

A MESSAGE BY DR ALHASSAN BAKO ZAKU, MINISTER OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA AT THE JOINT INAUGURAL SESSION OF THE 1ST COMSATS CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING AND THE 12TH COMSATS COORDINATING COUNCIL MEETING HOLDING AT ABUJA SHERATON HOTEL AND TOWERS ON 27TH APRIL 2009 AT 10.00 A.M

The Chief Guest, Dr. Sam Egwu, Honorable Minister of Education, Federal Republic of Nigeria;
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors of member and potential member-countries here present;
The Executive Director, Commission on Science and Technology for Sustainable Development in the South (COMSATS), Dr. Imtinan Ehali Qureshi;
Honourable Ministers and representatives of COMSATS' Member States of COMSATS' focal points in member countries present here;
Distinguished members of COMSATS' Coordinating Council and Heads of Centres of Excellence here present;
The Host, Prof. Sam Ale, OFR, mni, Director General, National Mathematical Centre, Abuja;
Invited Members of the Scientific Community in Nigeria present here;
Other Invited Guests;
Gentlemen of the Press;
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

I would like to begin by expressing my delight, on behalf of the Government of Federal Republic of Nigeria, at the wonderful opportunity given to Nigeria to host the 1st COMSATS' Consultative Meeting and the 12th COMSATS' Coordinating Council Meeting at a time when our greatest challenge is how to make Science and Technology drive the national economic and technological development and more importantly when the successful implementation of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's 7-point Agenda will depend on science, technology and innovation. Indeed, President Yar'Adua has declared that his administration will pursue a science and technology-led agenda for all sectors of our national economy, laying greater emphasis on science education at all levels.

I am particularly appreciative of the honour and privilege to address you all at this auspicious occasion of the joint inaugural sessions of these very important meetings, which has brought together distinguished scientists and scholars, under a platform that introduces a system of international Centres in the South to enable the South to rapidly acquire the latest scientific inquiries and technological development.

I cannot do justice to the importance of today's inaugural session without according due recognition to the presence in our midst of Your Excellencies, Ambassadors of focal points in COMSATS' member-countries and distinguished world class renowned scientists and participants at these COMSATS' meetings:

- We acknowledge the presence of Your Excellencies from the following member countries: Egypt, Ghana, Iran, Jamaica, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe;
- We welcome and acknowledge the presence of the following distinguished participants:
 - Mr. Muhammad Kashif Murtaza, Secretary, Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of Pakistan, Pakistan
 - Dr. Imtinan Elahi Qureshi, Executive Director, COMSATS Headquarters, Pakistan
 - Prof. Maged M. Al-Sherbiny, Assistant Minister for Scientific Research, Ministry of Higher Education and State Ministry for Scientific Research, Egypt

- Prof. S. Kwofie, Dept. of Materials, EMG (HOD), KNUST, Ghana
- Dr. Alireza Ghorbanali Allahyari, Director of Entrepreneurship, the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, the Iranian Research Organization for Science & Technology (IROST), Iran
- Mr. Arnoldo K. Ventura, Special Adviser to the Prime Minister, Jamaica
- Prof. Sam O. Ale, Director General, National Mathematical Centre (NMC), Nigeria
- Mr. Ndiaga MBAYE, Head, Department of Cooperation and Research Organizations of the Ministry of Biofuels, Renewable Energies and Scientific Research, Senegal
- Mr. M.B.A. Ekanayake, Secretary, Ministry of Science and Technology, Sri Lanka
- Dr. Ahmed Obeid Hassan, Director General, Industrial Research and Consultation Centre (IRCC), Sudan
- Dr. Matheo L Raphael, Director, Centre for the Development and Transfer of Technology, Tanzania
- Mr. Bashir R Kagere, Science Officer, Uganda National Council for Science and Technology, Uganda
- Prof. L R Ndlovu, Vice Chancellor, National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe
- Prof. Osama El Shabrawy, Ex-Vice President, National Research Center, Egypt
- Mr. Eugene Atiemo, Director, Building and Road Research Institute (BRRI-CSIR), Ghana
- Prof. Dr. Ahsana Dar, Senior Professor, HEJ Research Institute of Chemistry, Pakistan
- Dr. S.M. Junaid Zaidi, Rector, COMSATS Institute of Information Technology (CIIT), Pakistan
- Dr. A.P. Nanyaro, Director General, Tanzania Industrial Research and Development Organization, Tanzania
- Mr. Tajammul Hussain, Director General International Affairs, COMSATS Headquarters, Pakistan;
- Dr. Hasibullah, Advisor International Affairs COMSATS Headquarters, Pakistan
- Mr. Irfan Hayee, Senior Assistant Director (Programmes), COMSATS Headquarters, Pakistan.
- Mr. Amjad Hussain, JSA, Ministry of Science and Technology, Govt. of Pakistan, Pakistan
- Dr. Moiz ud Din, Head Dept of Mathematics, CIIT, Pakistan

You will recall that the 1st meeting of COMSATS' Coordinating Council was held in Pakistan in 1994 with representatives of Heads of States or Governments from 36 countries, including 22 Ministers of Science and Technology and Higher Education and by representatives of a number of international organizations. Today Nigeria, through the National Mathematical Centre (Abuja), is privileged to host COMSATS' meetings. Indeed, this is historic because we not only appreciate the importance of COMSATS in providing political backing to scientific and technological initiatives of major concern to the South but note the significance of the Network of Centres of Excellence in building high level scientific capacities in the South and in enriching mutual cooperation between the North and the South in science and technology. I sincerely congratulate the organizers of this Network especially the Chairman and the Executive Director of COMSATS Headquarters, for the major role they are playing in the economic transformation in the South.

I am equally happy to note that COMSATS' Coordinating Council had among other things continued to strive to attract talent, reduce brain-drain and induce competent third world scientists and technologists working abroad to return to their countries; to facilitate the transfer of technology and supply to industry of highly qualified technical personnel as well as to assist in finding scientific solutions to complex developmental and environmental problems in the South; and in promoting joint technological ventures amongst the members of the Network.

In order to fulfill the above objectives, I am told that members of COMSATS essentially carry out functions including:

- a) To conduct high level training activities, nationally, regularly and internationally, in the scientific fields of each node of the Network in order to achieve a critical mass of highly qualified personnel in these fields in the South;
- b) To conduct basic and applied research in order to develop and test solutions to socio-economic development and environmental challenges blowing the South;
- c) To conduct interdisciplinary research and modeling in order to devise scientific solutions to problems that have global implications for environmentally sustainable development, and
- d) To provide scientific and technical services to the production and services sectors in the South.

As you are all aware, investment in science is vital for developing nations. In order to therefore achieve our quest for sustainable economic growth and development in the South, it is necessary that we aggressively and effectively promote excellence in science and technology among member countries of COMSATS. A country that neglects science education for its citizens does so at its own peril. It is in realizing this fact that, with Nigeria's external debt reduced drastically, Federal Government of Nigeria has made firm commitment to upgrade the Centres of Excellence in Nigeria to a world class status as a way of producing highly skilled scientific professionals of the future. This position is inevitable as the Federal Government of Nigeria is making frantic efforts to place Nigeria in her rightful position in the world of advanced technology as a vehicle for the achievement of our vision 20:20:20.

It is an established fact that sustained public investments in science in the third world nations generate impressive returns. It is therefore, lack of investments that robs these countries of their scientists who feel alienated from their own societies and now ply their trades elsewhere, viewing science as a product of the industrialized world.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, we are all witnesses to the brain drain syndrome that has taken away and still continues to take away a significant number of the third world's intellectual capacity. For instance, today many of our children, who left the shores of the third world continents for greener pasture in developed countries, are making waves in their chosen fields. The reasons for their departure from our continents cannot be distanced from the failure of our past governments to invest adequately in academic and research efforts. We are glad to say that this is no longer so. We hope that collaborative meetings like this one will continue to be organized, so that scientists from third world countries in the Diaspora will see the need to return home to render their services for the socio-economic development of the third world nations and better life for our children and our children's children.

We are also confident that as soon as COMSATS' Consultative Committee and Coordinating Council Meetings is able to adequately provide the necessary platform for attracting talents, reduce brain-drain and induce competent third world scientists and technologists working abroad to return to their countries. This would make our students have access generally to quality instructors in a bid to re-orientate the perception of most of the young in science and technology education. We are certain that the institutions in the North would find it easier to cooperate with those in the South, if the latter attained a high level of excellence in the shortest possible time.

Therefore, we want to stress that the COMSATS' Centres of Excellence should work not only for the prosperity of the South, but also be a major focus of international cooperation in the larger interest of mankind. That is why I am particularly delighted at the activities of the National Mathematical Centre Abuja, Nigeria, a parastatal of the Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Education, responsible for developing appropriate initiatives and resources of

international standing for the re-awakening and sustaining of interest in the study of the mathematical sciences at all levels of our education strata, which not only satisfied, the criteria for nomination but qualified and had since been upgrading to the status of one of the Network of International Science and Technology Centres in the South and has continued to serve creditably as one of the first nodes of the Network for mathematical modeling in the sub region. I acknowledge the commitment of the Centre's management under the able leadership of Professor Sam Ale in ensuring the success of these COMSATS' meetings. That we are gathered here today is a testimony of your efforts. Keep up the good job.

With effective high-level training and research activities in the scientific fields of each node of the network, just as has been the case with the Centre, indeed countries of the third world, including Nigeria will be able to build knowledge base and capacity needed to achieve a critical mass of highly qualified personnel and consequently, help the third world countries achieve the much-needed sustainable socio-economic growth. Therefore, it is necessary for COMSATS' Networks to not only continue to aggressively encourage the creation of world class Centres of Excellence in mathematics and sciences in the third world countries, but also to provide scientific and technical services to the production and services in the South as well as bring together outstanding scientists to work in collaboration with other renowned scientists and engineers for the socio-economic development of the third world countries.

Be that as it may, it is imperative to also remark that shortage of trained and research personnel constitutes a tremendous threat to our present day quality high education and has remained an un-wavering challenge. Thus, what I consider as the cardinal objective of the COMSATS' Consultative Committee and Coordinating Council Meetings is the building and sustaining of a critical mass of world class scientists and technologists in areas of frontier science and technology, which are of critical importance to sustainable economic development. This indeed is what has placed COMSATS Network Centres in the world map. Therefore, in order to sustain the tempo and indeed, realize the optimal objectives of COMSATS Coordinating Council and the Network in the long run, there is need for the provision of an avenue for international cooperation in the area of science and technology of global concern as well as finding scientific solutions to complex developmental problems in the South.

Since the news of the hosting of this COMSATS' Consultative Committee and COMSATS' Coordinating Council meetings came to the government of this country and the National Mathematical Centre, we had been determined to ensure impressive hosting of these meetings. You can therefore be assured of very stimulating COMSATS' meetings, comfortable and enjoyable stay in Nigeria.

Once more, may I welcome you all to this inaugural session and wish all participants rewarding scientific experiences, successful and fruitful deliberations.

Thank you all and God bless!