

A WELCOME ADDRESS BY PROF. SAM ALE, OFR, mni, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF NATIONAL MATHEMATICAL CENTRE AT THE JOINT INAUGURATION CEREMONY OF THE 1ST COMSATS' CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE AND THE 12TH COMSATS' COORDINATING COUNCIL MEETINGS BEING HOSTED BY THE NATIONAL MATHEMATICAL CENTRE, ABUJA, NIGERIA AT SHERATON HOTEL AND TOWERS, ABUJA ON 27TH APRIL 2009

ALL PROTOCOLS OBSERVED

I feel highly delighted to be asked to welcome you all at this memorable event in Abuja, Nigeria. First of all, I want to express the appreciation and profound gratitude on behalf of the National Mathematical Centre, Abuja, Nigeria, the Federal Ministries of Education, Science and Technology of Nigeria, to the Executive Director COMSATS, member countries of COMSATS for the thoughtful and splendid joint inauguration ceremony for the 1st COMSATS' Consultative Committee Meeting and the 12th COMSATS' Coordinating Council Meeting being held here in Abuja, Nigeria today.

I am therefore very pleased to welcome all the delegates and participants, from outside and inside this country, to this inauguration ceremony. We want to commend the "Commission on Science and Technology for Sustainable Development in the South" (COMSATS) for the establishment of an intergovernmental organization. This is clearly a practical demonstration of the developing countries' determination of bringing about a sustainable socio-economic change by facilitating South-South and North-South cooperation in Science and Technology.

I thank all the heads of national scientific focal points from member-countries comprising Egypt, Ghana, Iran, Jamaica, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe and heads or representatives of COMSATS' Network of 16 International Science and Technology Centres of Excellence as well as other participants of the COMSATS' meetings who have been here since last week. We shall expect the outcome of the meetings to be more than just articulating the position of Science and Technology as the prime mover of all sectors of the economy but also to make sure that recommendations to COMSATS Council, were able to key into the COMSATS mandates, of transfer of technology and enhancing the cooperation among COMSATS' member states, among others.

COMSATS' meetings will undertake their proceedings, from 27th to 29th April, 2009, during which general policy of the Network and upgrading of scientific institutions will be discussed on the first day, while the Coordinating Council will meet on 28th and 29th April 2009. At the COMSATS' Council meeting, heads or representatives of COMSATS' Network of 16 International S & T Centres of Excellence will have opportunities of deliberating upon matters relating to the programmes and activities of the Network.

We are glad to be playing host to these meetings especially as it is the first time that the Consultative Committee will be meeting since the inception of the Commission. This I consider very timely. Permit me to recognize in our midst today, the following distinguished foreign scientists and Nigerian scholars:

- Your Excellency the Honourable Minister of Education of Nigeria, Dr. Sam Egwu; Representative of Hon. Minister of Science and Technology of Nigeria, Dr. Alhassan B. Zaku;
- Dr. Imtihan Elahi Qureshi, Executive Director, COMSATS Headquarters, Islamabad, Pakistan;
- Your Excellencies, distinguished members of Consultative Committee here present: from Egypt, Ghana, Iran, Jamaica, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe
- Heads of 7 Centres of Excellence besides NMC (Coordinating Council members):
- Prof. Maged M. Al-Sherbiny, Assistant Minister for Scientific Research, Ministry of Higher Education and State Ministry for Scientific Research, Egypt
- Dr. Alireza Ghorbanali Allahyari, Director of Entrepreneurship, the Ministry of Science, Research and

- Technology, the Iranian Research Organization for Science & Technology (IROST), Iran
- Dr. Ahmed Obeid Hassan, Director General, Industrial Research and Consultation Centre (IRCC), Sudan
- 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

A full introduction of each of the delegates and participants will be given in the course of the meetings.

The CENTRE

The cardinal objective of the Centre is to promote research and assist in generating capacity in the mathematical sciences including mathematics, computer science, theoretical physics, statistics, and mathematical sciences education. These disciplines are known to be plagued by perennial staff shortages in Nigeria's higher education institutions. To deal with this problem, the Centre has continued to develop appropriate initiatives and resources of international standing for the re-awakening and sustaining of interest in the mathematical sciences and their applications to life and by doing so produce specialists and teachers in the Mathematical Sciences at all levels of our educational system.

Specifically, the Centre has been organizing regularly, combinations of the Foundation Postgraduate Courses and Research Oriented Training Courses or Workshops in various areas of the mathematical sciences as part of preparatory work towards launching an intensive series of such courses at the Centre in a scheme for increased production of Ph.Ds and high level manpower in these areas, and publishing their proceedings.

Recently, the Centre introduced a special Postgraduate Joint Degree Programme in the Mathematical Sciences. The activities enable large numbers of scholars in Nigerian higher education institutions to interact right here in Nigeria with world class scholars in a cost-effective way. They also facilitate linkages, cooperation and partnerships between scholars at home and abroad.

It also encourages and supports activities leading to the improvement of the teaching and learning of mathematics at all levels of the Nigerian Education System and also strives to identify and encourage young talents in mathematical sciences, stimulating enthusiasm for the physical sciences in young Nigerian students and scholars and preparing Nigeria for a leading role in the mathematical sciences, among others. All these activities are designed *to arouse and sustain the interest of students in the study of the mathematical sciences at all levels.*

The Centre is glad to have been able to collaborate with COMSATS, TWAS, and ICTP in organizing these activities. In this regard, the Centre is grateful to the Executive Director, COMSATS and all heads of COMSATS' Centres of Excellence for making this cooperation possible.

Providing training and capacity building in the mathematical sciences

Experts in the mathematical sciences would readily testify that the pace of development of these sciences in the last fifty years or so, has been breathtaking, as whole new branches of the mathematical sciences are continually being created. The trend is generating diverse applications which have high impact on every aspect of our lives.

We are glad that Mathematics today is having an enormous impact on science and society. The influence may be silent and appear hidden, but has shaped our world in many ways. Mathematical ideas have helped make possible the revolution in electronics, which has transformed the way we think and live today.

The information technology (IT) of today has transformed the world into a global village. These advances in science and technology are made possible by the numerous developments in pure mathematics. Mathematical sciences have helped improve the ability to predict weather, to measure the effects of

environmental hazards, project the outcomes of electrons, etc.

Indeed in this period of hi-technology and internet superhighways, no nation can make any meaningful achievement, particularly in economic development, without technology, whose foundations are science and mathematics.

Be that as it may, it is imperative to also remark that Vision 20:20 and the seven point-agenda of President Musa Yar'Adua cannot be realized without proactive actions on human capital development by interventionist agencies like the National Mathematical Centre. No nation deserving to grow can afford to negate its human resources. It is all the more so for a nation like ours, whose ambition is to be ranked among top twenty economies in the comity of nations.

New skills emerge everyday, and it is the responsibility of agencies like the Centre to prepare and equip Nigerians with the skills, enormous task that explains the reason why recent efforts embarked upon by the Centre have received unwavering support from our Federal and State Governments.

Therefore, in order to sustain the tempo and indeed, realize the optimal objectives of the mandates of the Centre in the long, run, there is need for governments of developing nations to support programmes designed to jumpstart the effective teaching and learning of science, mathematics and technology in our nations through constant release of appropriate funding.

It is therefore evident that no single academic institution, centre or other specialized outfit in the whole world, whether publicly or privately owned, and no matter how richly endowed, will ever be in a position to provide training and capacity building activities in the several branches of the mathematical sciences. This calls for cooperation and synergy among institutions providing capacity building services in the mathematical science, especially in the developing countries.

In the coming years, the Centre, will jointly with COMSATS member countries organize capacity building workshops and conferences as a way of fostering and deepening a culture of cutting edge research in the mathematical sciences in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Once again, we welcome and sincerely thank our Distinguished Honourable Ministers of Education, Science and Technology from Nigeria, Distinguished COMSATS Delegates/Participants, invited Guests from the Nigerian Scientific Community, our esteemed observers and the press for participating as the opening ceremony of the 1st and 12th COMSATS Consultative Committee and Coordinating Council Meetings respectively in Abuja-Nigeria.

Let us continue to work harder towards the improvement of the teaching and learning of mathematics and the sciences at all levels. This is because today mathematics/science in its various forms has found applications in economics, science, chemical and energy development, engineering and technology, and has equally become a veritable and indispensable tool in national development.

Therefore, the more we fail in developing mathematics in the minds of students, the more we fail in our national development and progress. The gap in the level of development between the advanced and developing countries is as a result of the gap in the level of the teaching and learning of mathematics and the sciences at all levels.

We hope this 3-day meeting will be very exciting and rewarding. We also hope the friendship you have nurtured at this forum will continue to bear fruits for the greater glory of the promotion of science and technology improvement programme in the various developing countries.

I will conclude this welcome address by wishing you good luck and Godspeed to all of you. And may I close with words which in many languages, in many forms, in many

religions, have brought comfort and strength. "May the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, be with us and remain with us always".

Thank you and God bless you all.