

ADDRESS BY
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Executive Director COMSATS

24th Meeting of COMSATS Coordinating Council,
(Karachi, Pakistan, 25-26 January 2023)

Inaugural: 24th Meeting of COMSATS Coordinating Council
(Karachi, 25-26 Jan. 2023-Salim Uzzaman Siddiqui Auditorium, ICCBS)

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Honourable Chief Guest, Distinguished Chairman Coordinating Council, Noble Host, Esteemed Members of the Coordinating Council, Worthy Advisors, Partners, Observers, Ladies & Gentlemen

Assalaam Alaikum & Good Morning!

It's a matter of honour and privilege to be facilitating the 24th Meeting of COMSATS Coordinating Council at Karachi, one of the largest cities in the world and the commercial hub of Pakistan.

I am pleased to extend a very warm welcome to this constellation of eminent scientists and high profile personalities belonging to the world of science and technology, present in person and online.

We are honoured to have Prof Dr. Atta Ur Rehman as the Chief Guest on this occasion and keenly looking forward to his enlightening keynote address.

We are pleased to have in-person participation of Prof. Dr. Ashraf Shaalan, Chairperson COMSATS Coordinating Council, as well as Heads or representatives of COMSATS Centres of Excellence in Egypt, the Gambia, Indonesia, Jordan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Syria and Tanzania. We are honoured to have with us Prof. M. H. A. Hassan, President of The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS), Italy, attending the meeting as Honourary Lifetime Member of the Council.

It is heartening to see the Council members, members of recently re-composed COMSATS Technical Advisory Committee and representatives of Partner International Organizations, also joining the meeting online from different parts of the world.

I am very delighted by the joining of Int'l Network of SMEs (INSME), Islamic Org for Food Security, and Alliance of National Science Orgs (ANSO) joining as Observers for the first time. I extend a warm welcome to them and hope that the potential for cooperation and collaboration will be fully exploited to our mutual advantage.

Having been appointed recently, I was very excited to welcome and meet our worthy guests.

Happy to see the diplomats of COMSATS Member States; representatives of R&D organizations, academic institutions, and government organizations of Pakistan; officials and scientists of ICCBS, attending the important gathering.

The occasion warrants special tribute to the Nobel Laureate and world renowned Pakistani Scientist Prof. Dr. Abdus Salaam. He envisioned this scientific platform of Commission on Science & Technology for Sustainable Development in the South, in 1994.

The overarching objective was to bridge the knowledge and technology gap between the global north and global south. The network of 24 centres of excellence established by the Member states is a solid foundation from which the forum derives its strength.

These Centres with active participation of their respective scientists, many of whom are participating this meeting, have been introducing scientific solutions to the challenges faced by the developing countries. Their contributions are highly commendable and COMSATS is indebted to them.

Having said that I wish to humbly submit at this juncture of completion of 28 years of COMSATS' existence that it may be important to review the milestones set and achieved.

We may also assess the collective strength of the Member states of COMSATS and explore and exploit the full potential of this platform to help the members keep pace with the scientific developments. COMSATS members collectively play a major role in the applications of scientific solutions to the global challenges.

Food security, climate change, pandemics, lethal diseases, global economic meltdown and its bearing on the developing economies, lack of access to the emerging technologies are the challenges that need to be addressed in a manner to convert them into opportunities.

During the COVID19 Pandemic the phenomenon of digitization emerged that helped save businesses from a complete breakdown due to lockdowns across the globe. The countries having necessary infrastructure and technological knowhow or digital readiness to support remote working were quick to save the economic decline having swiftly adapting to digitized interaction.

A lot of investment went into new digital transformation. The challenge posed by the digital transformation was dealt with greater success in developed world than the developing economies.

The impact of the pandemic was a clarion's call for the developing countries' governments, in particular, and their private sector, in general, nationally as also in the international connectivity context.

Together, COMSATS countries have the capability and scientific prowess to meet any challenge. COMSATS states may complement each other's expertise and give a definitive direction to this collective force.

Looking at our strengths, COMSATS members are 37% of the global population with largely people of younger age.

Geographically across 3 continents, the states cover 25.46 million sq kms. of the globe and contribute US\$ 22.12 trillion to the world economy, that is 23% of the combined GDP of the world which is US\$ 96.5 trillion. The gap between the size of the population and economic contribution needs to be bridged.

Nevertheless, it may be pertinent to mention that currently, at the innovations index, only 11 of the 27 COMSATS members figure among the first 100 countries but none in the first 10. In terms of Patents registration index, 14 members figure among the first 100. Hearteningly, 2 figure among first 10. This may be seen as an area of focus.

Following a well-defined strategy and collective approach to attain the foundational objectives of the forum may bring the remaining members in pace. It may also make a global impact to be called COMSATS world of science & prosperity.

We may aim to bring expertise of COMSATS Centres of Excellence in vital areas under one roof to create a COMSATS International Centre of Excellence (CICE).

How significant are the space sciences needs no emphasis. COMSATS may look into developing its own satellite manufacturing and launching facility. Idea is to launch a dedicated COMSATS Satellite and benefit all the members.

Venture into new technologies pertaining to the agricultural sector to address not just the food security but also add export capacity to meet the world demand and hence strengthen Global South's economies.

Medicines, UV based technological innovations, use of 3-D Printers in a variety of industrial products' manufacturing, Aviation, Emerging Technologies, Industrial applications of chemical and biosciences in the manufacturing domain, are some of the areas to venture into with scientific breakthroughs.

It will pave way for scientific innovations in great numbers, create employment opportunities, and result in wide spread economic prosperity.

Ladies and Gentleman,

R&D is inevitable if the developing countries want to reduce the technology and knowledge gap with the developed world.

Advances in terms of 6G, AI, Fin-Tech, Autonomous Robots, Biotech, High-Powered Lasers, accompanied with Internet of Things, Blockchain Technology, Web 3.0, and 3D Printing, are products of the R&D in science and technology which have now become the tools of unprecedented digital and economic might.

Establishment of a dedicated COMSATS International R&D Center should be an essential part of the organization.

Ladies and Gentleman,

I take pride in sharing that COMSATS has acquired expertise in the field of Information Technology. Based on this expertise, COMSATS launched Tele-health programme, which has been successful. It evinced the Government of Pakistan's interest to provide online medical facilities to the poor and disadvantaged people in remote and far-flung areas of the country.

This is a potentially an area of common benefit and I would like Member States to benefit from it.

Since joining the COMSATS as Executive Director, in less than 3 months, I have the pleasure of working and experiencing the expertise of some of the COMSATS centres of excellence.

I have no doubt that the future of the world is intrinsically linked to the Global South.

In line with the mechanisms of South-South and Triangular cooperation, COMSATS has signed more than 75 Memoranda of Understanding with various government ministries, academic institutions, national and international organizations.

The organization has co-organized or sponsored various scientific events on issues of crucial importance and relevance to developing countries.

Under a mechanism, the outcome of all activities of COMSATS shall be communicated to the relevant Government departments and private sectors to benefit through policy approach.

COMSATS Centres of Excellence may advise and guide the Governments in the implementation of the policies successfully and effectively.

Honourable Guests, Ladies and Gentleman,

The host of this Coordinating Council meeting, i.e. International Center for Chemical and Biological Sciences (ICCBS), is an active member of COMSATS' Network and one of the premier research establishments in the developing world.

I would end by expressing gratitude to the ICCBS' team under the leadership of an accomplished scientist, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary, Director ICCBS, for extending gracious hospitality and outstanding arrangements for the meeting.

I also commend COMSATS team who diligently made preparations for this important meeting. I hope that the two days of intensive deliberations will lead to tangible progress in terms of S&T cooperation among the Member States.

Thank you!