

Excellency, Dr Haddad Adel
Excellency, Dr Zahedi
Distinguished Excellencies and Invited Guests
Representatives of Embassies and International Organizations
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored this morning to address you on behalf of the Director General of UNESCO, Mr Kochiro Matsuura, my own behalf as the representative of UNESCO in the Islamic Republic of Iran and on behalf of my colleagues in the Science Policies & Sustainable Development Division of UNESCO, on the occasion of the Regional Forum on Science and Technology for Sustainable Development. I am indeed pleased to convey UNESCO's warm greetings to the participants, the organizers and the distinguished invited guests attending the event.

In this occasion, I would like to express my profound gratitude to the Government of the I. R. of Iran, Iranian National Commission for UNESCO, the ISESCO Regional Office in Tehran and TWAS for taking the initiative of organizing this very important event in collaboration with UNESCO Tehran Office. I must also take this opportunity to express my great appreciations to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the successful co-operation that exists between UNESCO and Iran.

I would also like to convey UNESCO's best wishes for a successful Forum and wish that this might become the sub-regional Forum of Science, Technology & Innovation Policy for the years to come. This Forum coincides with the 60th Anniversary of UNESCO which successfully carried out its missions of peace building within these years through Education, Science and Culture. This Forum certainly addresses noble objectives in direct relation to needy people which are one of the targeted groups in UNESCO.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the next three days, you will listen to presentations from high-level resource persons, examples from, different countries on how they formulate their policies, set priorities and reform their S&T systems to ensure that science, technology and innovation contribute to economic growth.

We are living in a period of unprecedented advances in science. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the future of humanity, to a large extent, depends on the continued vitality of science and its applications. Science has contributed immensely to the development of modern society and the application of scientific knowledge continues to furnish powerful means for solving many of the challenges facing humanity, such as the eradication of poverty and the provision of health care, food and safe drinking water.

At the same time, the way in which scientific endeavours are pursued around the world is marked by clear inequalities. Developing countries, for example, generally spend well below 1% of their GDP on scientific research, whereas rich countries devote between 2% and 3%. The number of scientists per million population in the developing countries is 10 to 30 times smaller than in developed countries. We have to acknowledge, with deep concern and regret, that these divisions are growing rather than narrowing. Investment in science and technology need therefore to be encouraged. Governments in developing countries must put science and technology at the top of their agenda. The scientific community has a role of advocacy. The parliamentarians have the major role of devoting appropriate long-term funding.

The advances made in recent years in genetic science and biotechnology hold out extraordinary prospects for humankind as a whole and for the individual. However, these scientific advances are giving rise to important new ethical issues which have implications for generations to come.

For example while in the field of health, a large number of diseases can now be controlled more effectively. At the same time, ethical questions arise such as whether it is acceptable to use cells from a human embryo, and if so, under what conditions. Today's great issues in science and technology cannot be considered without taking into account their ethical dimension, hence the important role of Parliaments in legislating for science.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased in this regard to note the importance given to Science and Technology in the current Fifth Development plan of the country. The UN System in Iran has responded positively to this direction by adopting Transfer of Science and Technology as one of the five selected priorities in United Nations Development Assessment Framework (UNDAF) under the leadership of UNESCO. This meeting is in fact considered as a solid step contributing to one of the areas being selected for joint support from the UN System. Other areas include Water Resources (Urban Water Management, Water Resources Management in Arid Zones, Qanats Systems), Disaster Preparedness and Environment as starting points. I take this opportunity to invite the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology to contribute to this programme and work closely with us in achieving better results.

Ladies and Gentlemen

In closing, I would like to extend to each and every one of you my best wishes for a fruitful exchange. I look forward to interesting discussions over the next three days.

Thank you.

Abdin Salih
Director & Representative
UNESCO Tehran Cluster Office