



Ministerial Roundtable on “harnessing S&T to address development challenges”

Prof. Tissa Vitarana, Senior Minister for Scientific Affairs, Sri Lanka

Madam Chairperson,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentleman,

I take this opportunity to thank the Secretary General of UNCTAD and the Secretariat of the CSTD for inviting me to this important ministerial roundtable.

The Government of Sri Lanka, in 2010 set a target to double its per capita GDP to 4000 US \$ by 2016.

In this backdrop, I am happy to report that Sri Lanka now has a National Strategy for Science Technology and Innovation, developed as an indigenous effort based on the S&T policy adopted when I was the Minister of Science and Technology. The strategy has a clear focus on locally harnessing Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) for our socio-economic development in a coordinated manner, with the emphasis on maximizing value addition to raw materials through the use of advanced technology. Through this we hope to increase our high tech value added exports which directly contribute to our economy, from the present 1.5% to 10% by 2016. It is very much aligned to the theme of this ministerial roundtable meeting.

The Strategy focuses on harnessing STI through directed research towards national needs, maximum appropriate use of advanced technologies and building a culture of techno-entrepreneurship. A close focused partnership between industry and STI is an essential part of the strategy for effective socio-economic development. This needs to be complemented by enhancing the capacity of the national research and innovation system together with improving the scientific literacy of our people and entrenching sustainability principles in all spheres of our STI activities. You would agree that no single line ministry in a government can achieve these goals as the stakeholders and infrastructure are scattered and disjointed. The key to successful implementation of our National STI strategy therefore is working together in a coordinated manner. The stakeholders from the public and the private sectors should come together to co-identify, co-plan and co produce the activities that are identified in the Strategy.

In recognition of this need the Government of Sri Lanka has established a dedicated Coordinating Secretariat for Science Technology and Innovation (COSTI) under my purview as the Senior Minister for Scientific Affairs. The COSTI will also function as the Secretariat for the Inter-Ministerial Council for Science, Technology and Innovation. The COSTI will work with both public and private sectors and direct STI activities on three pillars; economic development (eg harnessing natural resources through STI), social justice (such as food, water and energy security etc.) and environmental quality (such as a future earth programme and resilience to climate change).

Appreciation of the benefits of the National Nanotechnology Initiative (NNI) and the Vidatha programme, which has transferred technology to rural micro and SME sectors, has led to an increase in the private sector contribution to GERD (Gross Expenditure on R&D) from less than 10% to over 30% during the last 6 years. Encouraged by this the government at the last Budget offered a 300% tax relief for R&D carried out by enterprises.

Despite the global economic downturn the success of this national effort can be accelerated and sustained by the necessary support being provided by international organizations like the CSTD and UNESCO. Four main areas that need to be considered are:

1. Facilitating brain gain for countries like Sri Lanka
2. Promotion of open access to scientific literature and data as a global policy
3. Facilitating provision of technical assistance and training for STI personnel specific to national needs of less industrialized countries
4. Encouraging the development partners and donor community to regard STI as a sector essential for development and skilled jobs creation in their funding support for less industrialized countries.

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03 June 2013