Editorial

CONFERENCE ON TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

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From 19 to 21 November 1990 the Islamic Academy of Sciences organized a Conference in Antalya-Turkey, on the theme Technology Transfer for Development in the Muslim World.

The primary aim of the event was to seek a better understanding of the objectives, achievements and failures of regional, interregional and international cooperation in science and technology, and hence technology transfer. The conference was attended by a hundred distinguished individuals, industrialists, IAS Fellows and representatives of organizations within and outside the OIC System which includes outstanding experts in specialized fields of technology from private and public sectors, specialists from major intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

During the last decade, there have been significant changes in the perception of international co-operation in science and technology. Within an increasingly multipolar world economy, a number of successful new patterns for international scientific and technological co-operation, involving governments, industry, and the scientific community, have been developed. Although a more favorable environment is currently emerging for both South-North and East-West dialogue on the role and objectives of development of co-operation in general, co-operation in the Islamic World, particularly in the field of science and technology, has a special importance for many reasons. There are also increasing risks of a further isolation of the least developed countries from the dynamics of science and technology.

It was felt that holding of a high-level technology transfer conference of this type could help identify common focuses for the many activities planned in this area, mobilize the science and technology community, industrialists, as well as government authorities in Muslim countries, and give a new momentum to bilateral and multilateral scientific and technological co-operation within the OIC System. It was, also hoped that such a meeting could contribute to defining new ways of financing science and technology activities for development.

The conference provided a forum for debate on the pervasive role of technology transfer over a broad spectrum of most human endeavor and the implications of emerging socio-economic and technological trends for inter-Islamic science and technology co-operation in the years ahead.

The deliberations of the conference hence presented an opportunity to focus on emerging issues of relevance, not only to the agencies of the OIC System but also to industrialists and to the non-governmental science and technology community at large. It is hoped that the conference will have some impact on the orientation of the development plans and science and technology policies of the Muslim countries.

The doors of this conference were opened to the media and to the specialists from industry, public and private sectors. Free submission of papers in addition to the invited ones, the products and technology exhibition, and working group activities provided larger participation which would certainly assist in the dissemination of the message this conference would define.

The Declaration adopted by the IAS at the end of conference is as follows;

The Islamic Academy of Science:

a. Realizing that the world has entered into on era of new technological revolution in which the Muslim World is still a receiver rather than a partner;

b. Noting with concern that the technological gap between the Muslim World and the advanced countries is widening dramatically;

c. Noting with concern the secretive and restrictive measures taken by the advanced countries which constrain the normal flow of technology among the countries of the world;

d. Noting with satisfaction the progress that has been accomplished by a number of Islamic countries in the area of building national capability to assess, select, assimilate, maintain, diffuse and develop technology;

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e. Realizing with concern that only a few Islamic countries have integrated their R and D efforts with the activities of transfer of technology;

f. Recognizing that the private sector has a crucial role to play as a partner with the government in the process of transfer of technology of both inter and intra national levels, and noting with satisfaction that a number of Islamic countries have given adequate recognition to this partnership;

g. Emphasizing the importance of inter-Islamic cooperation in the generation and transfer of technology, and noting with satisfaction that some encouraging steps have taken place to promote such co-operation among a number of these countries;

h. Acknowledging the fact that a capable human resources' base has been the most important element behind all success stories of technology transfer;

i. Realizing that information is the most crucial element influencing technology-based development and technology transfer in particular and that so much, as a result, has been accomplished in several Islamic countries with regard to experience in technology transfer.

Appeals to leaders, policy and decision makers at all levels, and entrepreneurs in the Muslim World:

1. To take positive steps to acquire technology by all means and from all sources and to facilitate the unrestrictive flow of technology within the Muslim World;

2. To take tangible measures for undertaking technology transfer as an integrated and joint effort by the governments and private sectors of the Islamic countries;

3. To adopt the necessary measures to assess, select, assimilate, maintain, develop and diffuse technology with the ultimate objective of integrating technology into the national productive system of the Islamic countries;

4. To take effective and speedy measures to develop a base of qualified S and T manpower:

(i) To enable assimilation of transferred technology in the productive sector.

(ii) To enable continuous upgrading of foreign sourced and indigenously developed technology through innovative R and D.

5. To take the necessary measures to strengthen R and D activities and integrate them with the technology transfer operations;

6. To adopt policies that promote inter-Islamic countries' co-operation in the generation and transfer of technology through providing incentives to all parties involved including inter-alia incentives for the private sectors to actively interact and collectively act;

7. To initiate the necessary measures to strengthen the dissemination of information among the Islamic countries at all levels on opportunities that exist for co-operation, including the modality of joint ventures, and to make available the lessons learned from the experiences of Islamic countries in the practice of technology transfer.

I would like to emphasize the following points in order to achieve a most prosperous future for the Islamic World:

First, the knowledge gap not only between developed and developing countries but among the developing countries themselves is rapidly increasing. In order to prevent a further de-linking of more than two-thirds of the countries in the Muslim World from the dynamics of science and technology, a special OIC System-wide effort is needed. This calls for concerted action on the part of OIC specialized agencies in close co-operation with the IAS, the IDB, other regional development banks and last but not least, the bilateral agencies.

Second point relates to human resources development. There is, in most Muslim nations, a shortage of scientists and engineers. The promotion of basic science education and advanced training to prepare future generations of scientists, engineers and technical personnel, and the drive to enhance international mobility among such people, should have the highest political support. The systematic expansion of existing networks between the scientific institutions and between the scientists of the Islamic World would be a most effective approach.

A third element emerging is the need for a scientific-technological underpinning of all issues concerning the global commons. I cannot over-emphasize the importance of ensuring that decision makers are provided with latest sound and verifiable scientific and technological data on which to base their decisions, particularly in such a field as education and the developments in industrial technologies.

In conclusion, efficient technology transfer is an important determinant of industrial growth, increasing exports and efficient import substitution, improved standards of living, reduced unemployment levels and a healthy environment.

My hope is that our sights can be set on the turn of the century and our activities over the coming years better prepare the Muslim World for free, prosperous educated and environmentally sound life in the twenty-first century.

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