REMARKS BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN MINISTER OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, HONOURABLE MOSIBUDI MANGENA, AT THE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN SOCIETY (STS) FORUM, TOKYO, JAPAN, 7 OCTOBER 2007

Our Host, Honourable Koji Omi,
Fellow Ministers responsible for Science, Technology, Research and Innovation,
Representatives of Multi-National Corporations,
Presidents of International and Research Institutions,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen

On this auspicious occasion of the Science and Technology in Society (STS) Forum, allow me to recall the still vivid words of Japan's former Minister of Finance, and our host here today, Honourable Koji Omi, in his speech at the Africa Day Symposium on 25 May this year.

Mr Omi warned about the important ethical, safety and environmental questions that the advancement of science and technology raises. The crux of his argument is that as we discover better ways of utilising science and technology to our advantage, the more vigilant we must be to ensure we contain the negative consequences. Opportunities need to be exploited, but the risks must be controlled. Science and technology should not control the fate of humanity; humankind must triumph over temptations posed by advancements in science and technology.

Africa has aligned herself with the view that there is much in science and technology we can employ to address our current and future challenges in the areas of health, food and energy security, especially in the wake of major global challenges that include climate change. In this regard, I wish to talk to four distinctive points where science can be deployed to the betterment of the human condition.

The first relates to human capital development. There is ample scope for greater international cooperation on human capital development. Human capital produces the new knowledge required to grow the economies of countries. This is true for both the developed and developing world. We need to organise ourselves into robust South-South, North-South and inter-continental relationships to facilitate the training of scientists and engineers, as well as the exchange of researchers and teachers. The very successful relationship between my country and Japan in support of South Africa's Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA), is a case in point.

Similar initiatives include the South Africa-UK Science and Technology Cooperation in the Priority Areas of Biomedicine, Agriculture, Biotechnology, Environmental Protection, Utilisation of Natural Resources, as well as the agreements we have with countries such as Belgium, Finland, Germany and Flanders, to name but a few. South Africa is keen to increase the number of such ventures.

Secondly, we should not accept as a given that most of the infrastructure for global Science and Technology is located in the developed world. A few weeks ago President Thabo Mbeki inaugurated the African Component of the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology located in Cape Town, which is as a sequel to the other two major international biotechnology laboratories that are serving a network of seventy-four member countries.

There are other examples of this largely untapped potential, including the Southern African Large Telescope (SALT) based in Sutherland in the province of the Northern Cape, and our bid to host the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) Telescope we are now contesting with Australia.

For us to be able to tap into the global resources to build a robust knowledge production base, we need to actively and increasingly seek to attract the major international scientific infrastructure we are capable of hosting due to our geographical and human capital advantages. We have partly come to this STS Forum to begin a serious dialogue on how we can collaborate with world leaders to responsibly capitalise on and develop a myriad of South Africa's resources.

The third point relates to the enormous capacity that could be created if nations of the world brought their individual, albeit meagre, resources together. This could translate into a powerful international force for global common good. We still have an opportunity to bring our best technologies to bear on our common threats such as chemical weaponry and global warming, and enhance our ability to meet such challenges as the Millennium Development Goals. Whatever our socio-economic, political, ideological and religious differences, there is a common urgency to use science and technology to defeat the common threats to our existence. We should not miss this opportunity.

Finally, this Forum has the capacity to contribute, and possibly influence, some of the deliberations at the coming 2008 G8 Summit, here in Japan, and the 4th Tokyo International Conference for Africa's Development (TICAD).

TICAD IV, in particular, has the potential, once again through the joint effort of the Government of Japan, the United Nations, the Global Coalition for Africa and the World Bank, to keep Africa's development agenda at the forefront of the world's attention. Through this and other platforms we must continue to garner support for Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen, to answer the question of how we can ensure our wisdom is effectively used to maximise the deployment of science and technology for the benefit of humankind while guarding against the worst risks, I would like to argue that we have just begun to scrape the surface; there are infinitely more opportunities for the uses of S&T to address the common challenges alluded to, including others such as housing, the supply of clean water, sanitation, and so on.

South Africa is continuing to reach out to the continent to forge partnerships in science and technology as a means of addressing Africa's socio-economic development. We are convinced that through collective effort we can address the burdens carried by the continent.

May I, in closing, thank the Government and people of Japan once again for the opportunity to participate in this very important policy dialogue among the leading decision-makers in the world of Science and Technology.

I thank you.
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