

Global Forum: Building Science, Technology and Innovation Capacity for Sustainable Growth and Poverty Reduction

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Opening Remarks

Statement delivered by Mr. Kobsak Chutikul, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General of UNCTAD

Distinguished participants,

On behalf of Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, I wish to thank the World Bank for the opportunity accorded to UNCTAD to partner with the World Bank in the preparation of this very important and timely event.

Science, technology and innovation have seldom been as crucial to development as they are today. Technological advances are at the core of many contemporary phenomena, including knowledge-based societies, the network age and, regrettably, the digital divide. These phenomena have major implications for development. While modern technology offers opportunities for economic and social gains, its growth has been marked by asymmetrical access and use, both within and among nations. Global differences in economic and social well-being can in fact be traced partly to differences in levels and spread of technology.

The importance of science and technology is increasingly recognized at the intergovernmental level, and this can be seen, for example, in the outcome of the 2005 World Summit and the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). At the 2005 World Summit, world leaders recognized that international support can help developing countries to benefit from technological advancements and enhance their productive capacity. Heads of State committed themselves to a number of measures to address the special needs of developing countries in science and technology-related areas. They also committed themselves to promoting and facilitating access to technologies, and to assisting developing countries in their efforts to promote and develop national science and technology strategies. However, although science and technology have been mentioned as a cross-cutting issue in almost all major UN conferences and summits, this forum provides an opportunity to address science, technology and innovation as an issue in its own right, and as having a crucial role to play in meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

Science and technology can be powerful tools in combating poverty through their contribution to sustained economic growth, enhanced market efficiency, and creation of employment opportunities. The application of science and technology in agriculture has the potential to increase food production through better soil management, efficient irrigation and high-yield crops with enhanced food value. Science and technology may also play a pivotal role in meeting health-related MDGs: drugs, vaccines, diagnostic systems, improved access to medical information, and monitoring systems for drug quality are indispensable in the fight against infant and maternal mortality, malaria, HIV/AIDS and other diseases.

However, the socio-economic benefits of modern science and technology have yet to reach across all countries and people. It is not the lack of science or technological innovation, but rather the lack of

national capacity to harness its potential that hinders countries from fully leveraging this vehicle for socio-economic progress and development. In many developing countries' development strategies, the science and technology component has been marginalized.

You will have before you a background report prepared by UNCTAD entitled "The role of science, technology and innovation in the achievement of the MDGs". The report elaborates a number of strategies at the national and international level for promoting science and technology for development. It stresses the fundamental importance of building a solid national science and technology base to enable the generation, use and diffusion of scientific and technological knowledge.

I hope you will address many of the policy areas that have to be tackled to ensure that potential benefits from globalization of knowledge and technology reach a greater number of developing countries. UNCTAD's research suggests that active and long-term-oriented government intervention is needed, with four main goals in mind: first, to better tailor education to the needs of industry; second, to encourage collaboration between public and private R&D; third, to establish appropriate infrastructure, including science parks and incubators; and fourth, to make strategic use of intellectual property systems. In short, science and technology must be mainstreamed into countries' development efforts.

In UNCTAD's own work, science and technology have always figured prominently. As the lead entity for science and technology within the UN system, UNCTAD has contributed significantly to the conceptualization of technology issues such as the legal environment for technology transfer and the various channels for acquisition; the terms and conditions of the technology transfer process; the technological capacity building process, and best practices for obtaining access to technology.

UNCTAD also services the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), which was established in 1992 to provide high-level advice to the General Assembly and ECOSOC through analysis and appropriate policy recommendations. In addition, it has recently been designated by ECOSOC as the focal point for UN system-wide follow-up to WSIS.

To assist developing countries in their efforts to build sound national systems of innovation, UNCTAD carries out Science, Technology and Innovation Policy reviews (STIPs). The main objective of these reviews is to help developing countries and countries with economies in transition to evaluate the effectiveness of national science and technology policies and their impact on wealth creation, industrial competitiveness and quality of life. The focus of our STIPs is to help Governments, especially those in Africa, formulate and implement science and technology policies that address their development challenges. We have already completed three reviews (Colombia, Jamaica and Iran), and we are currently undertaking one for Angola. We have begun planning reviews for Sierra Leone, Mauritania and Mauritius. We would like to invite the World Bank and other interested development partners such as UNESCO and the African Development Bank to join us in this endeavour.

Distinguished participants,

We look forward to discussing concrete ideas for bringing science and technology to the forefront of the global development agenda, and for translating political commitment into concrete action. And I

hope the meeting will mark the beginning of closer collaboration between UNCTAD and the World Bank in the area of science and technology.

Finally, Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, Secretary-General of UNCTAD, could not attend this Forum due to prior engagements. He asked me to convey to you his strong belief in the importance of science and technology for development, his commitment to strengthening activities in the science and technology field, and his very best wishes for a successful outcome to this meeting.