Keynote Address by Mr. Kofi Annan at the InfoSys Science Foundation Prize Ceremony
February 8 2014, Bangalore

1. Distinguished guests, laureates, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your warm welcome.

2. It is a privilege to be with you for this celebration of achievement.

3. Let me thank Mr. Murthy and all at the Infosys Science Foundation for inviting me, and for hosting this important initiative.

4. Let me also add my warm congratulations to this year's laureates.

5. Each, as we have heard, is thoroughly deserving of this prestigious recognition.

6. The status of the InfoSys Prize and your achievements underline that India is increasingly a global leader in science, research and innovation.

7. This leadership does, of course, bring an increased responsibility.

8. It is a responsibility to help identify and develop innovative scientific solutions to our world's most urgent and complex problems.

9. This evening, I would like to briefly discuss how this responsibility can be met.

10. Ladies and gentlemen, whether we are talking about the state of the global economy, the health of our planet, or the divisions within our societies, there is no doubt that we face serious challenges.

11. Familiar foes, and new and emerging challenges threaten to reverse real progress made in recent decades.

12. Climate change is perhaps the most pressing and complex of these.

13. It is not just an environmental issue.

14. Rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and extreme weather events are an all-encompassing threat to our food and water supplies, our health and security.

15. Mitigating the impact of climate change will require a fundamental revision of how we manage our economies, societies and the environment.

16. But delivering such essential change will not be easy.

17. It will require us to develop a long term vision for our global community, based on common values and goals.

18. It will require political will and ethical leadership to realize this vision at the national and international levels.

19. And crucially, it will require us to harness the power of science, innovation and technology.

20. Clean energy sources must be identified, improved and put in place.

21. New ways of production must be developed which reduce waste and our carbon footprint.

22. New treatments must be found to tackle disease and chronic illness.

23. By dedicating your research to finding such solutions, you can make a major contribution to the global good.

24. Importantly, you will also give India a huge competitive advantage.

25. Scientific innovation can strengthen industry and transform society by facilitating the transition to a high-value, knowledge-based economy.

26. This transition is well underway in India - for decades a leader in the field of information technology.

27. So how can you build on this success?

28. At the root of scientific advances is the brilliance, imagination and hard-work of talented people.

29. The leaders in scientific innovation will therefore be those countries which maximize the potential of their citizens and retain the brightest and best minds.

30. In the past, India has lost many of its most talented young people to research posts and jobs abroad.

31. This ‘brain drain’ has added greatly to the economies of their new homes in North America and Europe but damaged growth and prosperity in those they have left behind.

32. In today’s interconnected world, we cannot stop people moving to take advantage of the opportunities that exist around them.

33. The answer is to provide the conditions and incentives where they can realize their dreams at home.

34. The evidence suggests that we are seeing these conditions put in place in India.

35. Indian scientists and researchers increasingly no longer feel the need to travel abroad to fulfil their potential.

36. Opportunities for cutting-edge work and research here are multiplying.

37. This is not only keeping many talented young people in India but also persuading those who have gone abroad to return.

38. There is, however, no room for complacency.

39. It was India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who declared over half a century ago that this country was too poor not to invest in scientific research.

40. India’s goal of becoming a global education superpower - and its continued strong economic growth – cannot be achieved without significant investment and effort.

41. So the Government is to be congratulated for its ambitious plans to expand to 30 per cent the number of young people going to university.

42. And for its determination to increase investment in R&D to 2 per cent of GDP from its present 0.25 per cent.

43. In a country which is set to have the world’s youngest population by the year 2020, the jobs created by such investment will be crucial.

44. And when coupled with life-long education and training, especially for girls, it can lift millions of people in India out of poverty.

45. This renewed focus on research in India has been mirrored across the region.

46. China, the Republic of Korea, and Hong Kong have all doubled their investment in research over the past decade.

47. Today, 40 per cent of all researchers in the world are located in Asia and the Pacific.

48. This is a huge opportunity to overcome the traditional dominance in science of the mature economies.

49. By building a regional network of research institutions, resources can be pooled and knowledge shared to address common challenges in Asia and the global South.

50. So I urge you to spearhead greater exchanges and collaboration amongst academic institutions, particularly those in Africa, which have much to learn from your experiences.

51. As well as co-operation across borders, we must harness the best of every sector through imaginative public-private partnerships.

52. As countries struggle with the aftermath of the financial crisis, the involvement of the corporate sector can help unlock new resources.

53. It can unleash the energy, creativity and entrepreneurial spirit critical to transforming promising research into practical solutions.

54. Academia can make a valuable contribution by aligning research with real-world concerns, particularly those of the poorest and most vulnerable.

55. Governments also have a role in directing research priorities, and putting in place the right framework and incentives to encourage wider investment in education and research.

56. They must ensure that scientific research is not exploitative, that it is guided by ethical decisions and values, and that its benefits are available to all.

57. Perhaps most importantly, they must develop fair intellectual property regimes which enable and encourage, rather than stifle, innovation.

58. And ensure that such regimes do not privilege the private sector at the expense of vulnerable communities, traditional knowledge and bio-diversity.

59. When these conditions exist, we see some of the greatest gains in overcoming hunger, poor health and delivering sustainable development.

60. Through my work with AGRA – the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa – I have seen how all sectors can come together successfully.

61. AGRA's Program for Africa's Seeds has established and supports country-level crop breeding teams who work with local farmers and research institutes.

62. Local entrepreneurs are helped to set up companies to multiply and distribute the improved seeds.

63. Farmers are given help to buy appropriate seeds and acquire the knowledge to increase productivity. The result, on average, is a doubling of yields.

64. Nor is this a short-term project. To ensure these important efforts continue, the education and research of dozens of African crop scientists has been funded.

65. In other fields there are similar examples where partnerships are capitalizing on innovative research to make a real difference to people's lives.

66. Efforts to find an effective cure for HIV/Aids are being accelerated through a partnership of governments, academics, pharmaceutical companies and charitable foundations.

67. By harnessing the unique strengths of each, the International Aids Vaccine Initiative is furthering progress towards the cherished prize of a vaccine to prevent the transmission of the deadly disease.

68. Ladies and gentlemen,

69. India is an economic and political powerhouse which has yet to realize its full potential.

70. You can be a huge force for good, and we need you to play a bigger role in addressing our most complex and pressing challenges.

71. By focusing your formidable scientific firepower on our most urgent problems, you can build a fairer, more prosperous and sustainable future for us all.

72. Let me congratulate once again this evening's laureates; I hope that this well-deserved recognition will help encourage others to follow your lead.

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