



# The Foundation for Democracy in Africa

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## Press Release

### **Support for Centers of Excellence & an Enabling Economic Environment are the Keys for Addressing Africa's Science and Technology Development Needs**

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**Washington, DC – December 22, 2004** – Over 500 participants gathered to attend the opening ceremony of the three-day 1<sup>st</sup> African Congress for Scientific Research, Technology and Drug Industry, organized by African Society of Scientific Research & Technology, African Union Commission and Foundation for Democracy in Africa, which took place from December 13-15, 2004 at the National Research Center of Egypt and the Mena House Oberoi hotel.

In his keynote remarks during the opening session of the congress, H.E. Tag El Din - representing His Excellency Ahmad Nazif, Prime Minister of Egypt - underscored the importance of scientific research to the improvement of the standard of living of the people of Egypt and of Africa, and the impact that the increase in the use of science and technology in Africa will have on reducing the devastation from diseases such as HIV/AIDS, TB, and Malaria and in the efforts to reclaim desert areas for agriculture and resettlement - a major problem faced by Egypt and some other African countries. The minister urged the conference to come up with succinct recommendations and action plan.

H.E. Prof. Nagia Essayed, Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology of the African Union Commission, provided remarks on behalf of H.E. Alpha Konare, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, she expressed AU's gratitude to the government and people of Egypt, to the African Society of Scientific Research and Technology (ASSRT), and to the Foundation for Democracy in Africa (FDA) for hosting the conference. Prof. Essayed shared the core functions of her office, which include the coordination of policies relating to Human Resources Development, Science and Technology in African Union Member States, the promotion of Science and Technology, the strengthening of cooperation in the field of education and training among others. She also expressed the African Union's interest to promote the integration of ICT's into Research and Development and to encourage the interest of youth in science and technology.

Prof. Dabees the President of African Society of Scientific Research & Technology emphasized in his talk that the Legal & Economic Systems of the African Countries should provide an enabling environment to the scientists and to the Development of Scientific Research & Technology. He also emphasized the need for public-private sector partnership to encourage investment in Science & Technology. He mentioned the role of Civil Society organizations to

create awareness among Governments for the need to prioritize Science & Technology & allocate a considerable budget for Research & Development.

The conference featured presentations from private sector, civil society and government representatives, that covered a variety of Science & Technology related topics ranging from “Science and Technology Development Link: Historical Overview and Challenges for African Countries” to “Drug Industry and Traditional Medicine”. These presentations underscored the importance of science and technology for industrial and economic development and for the improvement of health and living conditions in Africa. They highlighted the growing scientific and knowledge gap between Africa and the rest of the world and between North and Sub-Saharan Africa. For instance the average number of scientists and engineers per million is about 83 in Sub-Saharan Africa, significantly below the average across North Africa (483), Asia excluding Japan (783) and 1102 in industrial countries. The gap between Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa is also illustrated by the relative strength of Egyptian Pharmaceutical industries. Egypt has more than 720 Pharmaceutical companies. The participants visited EVA Pharmaceutical Company of Egypt (EVA Pharma) – one company of a privately owned Egyptian conglomerate of companies specializing in pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, agriculture, engineering, chemicals and the distribution of medical appliances. EVA Pharma has been ranked 27 out of 720 pharmaceutical companies in Egypt and has 83 products and 157 new products in the pipeline.

The delegates also visited ACAPI pharmaceutical company of Egypt, which acquires patents in Biotechnology and has PIC (Pharmaceutical Inspection Convention). It also sets an example of social corporate responsibility as they create jobs for disabled persons (blind) and set a braille system for them to identify their work in packaging of medicines.

Participants welcomed the “Nelson Mandela Institution for Knowledge Building and the Advancement of Science and Technology”. This Institution emphasizes the promotion of excellence in science, engineering and their applications to reduce the growing knowledge and scientific gap and enhance the development of Africa. It is supported by the Sub-Saharan African Learning Network (SSALN) and the African Institute of Science and Technology (AIST).

Recommendations supporting the development of scientific research and capacity in Africa were made for a number of key sectors, including water, agriculture and food technology, health care and drugs technology and biotechnology. A large focus of the deliberations during the conference were around the need to support the establishment of the African Institute of Science and Technology and existing higher learning institutions, particularly those that focus on scientific research and development. As the conference recommendations read, “Support the existing and provide for the establishment of new centers of excellence of scientific research and development such as the African Institute for Science and Technology [, and] Enhance the environment that will foster research creativity and innovation among these centers of excellence with the aid of the input from the scientific council.” Recommendations were also made on issues related to science and research infrastructure, biotechnology, water & energy, popularization & integration of science and technology, critical technologies for value-added creation, responsible management, intellectual property rights, centers of excellence, African

Diaspora initiatives, the development of an African Congress on Science and Technology Secretariat as well as science and technology standards & ethics.

A delegation from the conference also met with the First Lady of Egypt, H.E. Mrs. Susan Mubarak at the Presidential Palace to brief her about the Congress and to thank her for her continued leadership in advancing the contribution of women. Dr. Amany Asfour, secretary general ASSRT and of the lead conference organizer, gave H.E. Mubarak an update on the conference. H.E. Mubarak welcomed the delegation, to the Palace and underscored the need to support scientific research to enhance Africa economic development. In particular, she stressed that “mastering science and technology was vital to the improvement of health and living standards and the development of Africa. She stressed that the improvement of welfare following advances in science and technology was likely to contribute to peace building and reduction of gender disparities. She stressed that women are often the victims of conflict in all of its phases and their voices are not allowed to be heard despite the devastation that the conflicts cause them. Mrs. Mubarak urged the delegates to work for peace and conflict resolution to minimize the sufferings that conflicts cause women and girls. A cordial discussion between the First Lady and members of the delegation ensued.

Participants from government and civil society organizations from Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Nigeria, Cameroon, Togo, Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Congo Brazzaville, Sudan, Angola, Mozambique, Nigeria, Bahamas, Jamaica and the United States of America attended the congress, including H.E. Gerard Kamanda Wa Kamanda, Minister of Science & Technology of the Democratic Republic of Congo; Honorable John Otim, Senior Presidential advisor, the Republic of Uganda; H.E. Abdel Kadar Hagag, Ambassador of Algeria to Egypt and; H.E. Yahaya M Madi, Ambassador of Malawi to Arab Republic of Egypt among others. The congress was organized by the African Society of Scientific Research and Technology (ASSRT), The Foundation for Democracy in Africa, the National Research Center of Egypt and the African Union Commission.

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