

**Mr President Cyril Ramaphosa,  
Mr Minister Blade Nzimande,  
Your Excellencies,  
Dear Colleagues and Friends,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Some of you in the audience may still recall the 1999 UNESCO World Conference on Science held 23 years ago in Budapest, the capital of Hungary. It was the first intergovernmental meeting aimed at discussing the role of science and our shared responsibility to define the way humanity could cope with the ever-pressing challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Unfortunately, the alarming pressure of global challenges has not decreased since then, but this is not to say that the conference did not make an impact. Its declaration served as a point of reference for policy actions and legislation and paved the way in increasing science's involvement in policy-making. It was also the closing declaration of this summit that called for a follow-up conference series, which we now recognise as the biennial World Science Forum event. I can only praise the wisdom and dedication of my predecessors, the leaders of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences at that time, who took the initiative and offered to host the first conferences in Budapest. Their enterprise was immediately endorsed by UNESCO, the International Council of Scientific Unions, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which became the founding partners of the World Science Forum. Without their continued support and the excellent partnership of The World Academy of Sciences, the InterAcademy Partnership, the European Academies Science Advisory Council, and, recently, the

Global Young Academy, the World Science Forum series could never have become an event of the magnitude as we witness it today.

In 2013, this biennial series of meetings acquired a new dimension by being held – for the first time – outside of Europe by an emerging country, Brazil, with great success. Four years later we were able to attend an historic and truly memorable gathering in Jordan with the theme of “Science for Peace”, which saw attendance numbers that surpassed all previous events.

After the celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of WSF in Budapest in 2019, and after almost 3 years of the Covid pandemic, we are finally here in Cape Town, South Africa, once again in a country which has already invested so much into science and technology and which is dedicated to doing even more.

But hosting the World Science Forum is not only a testament to respecting the importance of scientific knowledge, it is also the expression of a leading role in science diplomacy that South Africa is also well-known for. As I look around in this room, I have no doubt we could not have chosen a better location for this prestigious, scientific assembly. The road leading to this moment has been one of steady ascension, and the role of this Forum in integrating the world’s diverse scientific communities is certainly remarkable.

I am fully aware of the tremendous underlying efforts required for the host country in organising an international event of this size. Let me express our sincere appreciation to the Republic of South Africa and the Department of Science and Innovation for pursuing this overwhelming task. Although this is but the opening ceremony, I am confident that the efforts of my fellow co-chair Minister Blade Nzimande and the organising

team from DSI, led by Mr Daan du Toit, will provide inspiration to all those who have yet to contribute to the success of this Forum.

**Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The main theme of the 2022 World Science Forum is “Science for Social Justice”. There will be several plenary and thematic sessions in which the floor will be opened up for lively discussions on the many aspects of this topic, but for now, let me just share with you a few thoughts on my personal approach that underpins this broad concept.

There is no denying that scientific research and its many applications that fuel technological progress have made our world a better place for an increasing number of people. Thanks to them, we live longer. Until recently, the number of people suffering from hunger or extreme poverty had been dropping steadily, and more and more had been able to gain access to education, healthcare and scientific information on a global scale.

However, according to the latest UN report on sustainability, we seem to have reached the limits of our current path of development. Inequalities are more apparent than ever, climate change seems unstoppable, hunger and food insecurity are on the rise again, as are the military conflicts resulting in the highest number of people forced to flee their homes in decades. Our global civilisation is clearly pushing its boundaries, and this must have its consequences for scientific research as well.

Beyond the urge to deliver the latest scientific breakthroughs, we need to make sure that scientific information is produced, distributed and, most

importantly, used in a just and socially responsible manner. We must insist that this is indeed taken into consideration in the policy decisions of governments, in the business decisions of powerful global companies, and in our everyday decisions as ordinary people, while we are more exposed to an unreliable flood of information than ever before.

Science alone cannot deliver social justice. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the responsible and wise use of scientific information can contribute to achieving a fair and sustainable world. Our joint task as stakeholders of science, including my fellow researchers, politicians, media representatives, industrialists, and civil society is to make sure that we use the evidence that we already have, and act accordingly.

### **Dear Colleagues,**

When talking about social justice in science, we cannot forget about the divides between the traditional powerhouses of scientific research, the emerging scientific powers of the world, and those which have yet to make a strong commitment. We cannot afford to waste talented minds anywhere in the world, and especially not the young generations of developing nations. The role of the African continent, with its vast reserves of both natural and human resources, its extraordinary diversity of nature and cultures, and a still largely unexplored wealth of indigenous knowledge cannot be overemphasised. We need to have this array of resources onboard in our quest to provide solutions to global challenges.

Therefore, it is essential to develop mechanisms which can guarantee that investing into science and education on the national level is not jeopardised by an ever-stronger appetite for brain-drain globally. Coming from Hungary, a relatively small Central European state of modest economic stature, I am aware of the difficulties of retaining human

capacity in science. I will be glad to share our experience at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in this regard, but I am certain that other delegates in this room – including those from our host country – can also present some instructive examples.

I would also argue for the importance of the basic sciences and for research which is driven by curiosity without any direct application in mind. A solid base in quality education and curiosity-driven research will continue to be the greatest asset of any country in joining the global leaders in innovation, but it will also be imperative on our way to the fulfilment of the idea of social justice on a global level. We are in great need of international science agreements and funding schemes that rate the preservation of and support for national science capacities as a top priority and a prerequisite of global stability and sustainability.

The 4-day programme of the 2022 World Science Forum offers, once again, a great opportunity for policy makers, journalists, representatives of industry and society, as well as us scientists to engage in inspiring debates and honest discussions. I am truly thankful that we have the privilege of enjoying this programme in such a beautiful city and among so many wonderful people from all around the world. I wish you all an extraordinary meeting at the World Science Forum in Cape Town.