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**International Symposium on Biodiversity of Nematodes in Pakistan
(5th National Nematological Conference)
17-19 May 2004**

**Welcome address in the Inaugural Session on 17th May 2004
by Dr. Manzoor H. Soomro, President PSN**

Bismillahirrehmanirrahim,

Honourable Chief Guest Dr. Badaruddin Soomro, Chairman – PARC,
The Vice Chancellor University of Karachi Professor Pirzada Qasim Siddiui,
Professor Abdul Ghaffar, Faculty of Karachi University,
World Renowned Nematologist Dr. Muhammad Rafiq Siddiqui,
The Council of Pakistan Society of Nematologists
Delegates, Gentlemen, Ladies and Dear Students,

Assalam-o-Alaikum,

On behalf of the Pakistan Society of Nematologists and the Host Institution University of Karachi, I welcome you all to the Fifth National Nematological Conference with the title “International Symposium on Biodiversity of Nematodes in Pakistan”. We are particularly grateful to Dr. Soomro and Dr. Prizada Qasim for sparing time to be with us despite the fact that Monday is always a very busy day for these people! We thank you Sir.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the importance of biodiversity has always been there but in recent decades we have realized it a bit more. Certain human interventions due to various pressures of the society, the biodiversity has been under threat. The other threat in my opinion is the extinction of the specialists who are I think a special breed and can determine and map biodiversity especially of the tiny organisms like nematodes, I mean the taxonomists.

Day by day, the trend of researchers in any field of biology is moving away from taxonomy. I guess there are two reasons for that: one, taxonomy is relatively difficult and cumbersome and is not directly appreciated by the high ups and the policy makers. One would say, well, if there are 50,000 nematodes per square meter of soil, so what? But I think without that first step, there could be no second step, which in my opinion would be to see

what role is that organism playing in the ecosystem. A colleague Nematologist from National Nematological Research Centre (NNRC) investigated the oil spill of recent past in our coastal waters to determine the nematode fauna. She found one species present all along and in good numbers. Well for some, it is just a report of presence of nematodes despite the pollution in water. But in fact it is much more than that; the need is to further investigate why that nematode can survive the pollution? And whether that nematode species can play a role in cleaning the oil pollution!

I take this opportunity to congratulate the scientist; the NNRC and University of Karachi on this discovery with the request to further invest into such research, which can save billions of rupees to the nation. But this also indicates that there is a need to strengthen the human resource at NNRC.

NNRC is really a national asset and I congratulate its founders and supporters: Dr. M.A. Maqbool, Dr. Abdul Ghaffar, the PARC and its Founder Chairman Dr. Amir Muhammad, Pakistan Science Foundation and the University of Karachi for supporting the establishment of the Centre.

Distinguished Guests, Nematodes are diverse in their behavior and can survive very harsh conditions by changing their physiology and my fellow Nematologists would know that NASA took nematode species into space to understand their tactics of surviving the adverse conditions and thereby learn how mankind can benefit from these tiny creatures called nematodes. Let us not forget that all the Almighty's creations are, but for the benefit of man kind, we only have to think and research as to why, when where and how? For the matter it has been demonstrated in Pakistan by our very own Nematologist, Dr. Shahina Fayyaz and her group that some nematodes can actually help us manage the insect pests of cash crops like cotton, vegetables and date palm.

Honorable Audience, Dr. Abdul Ghaffar will elaborate on the history and development of Pakistan Society of Nematologists but I would now like to give you a brief account of what PSN has been up to for the last couple of years since the election of present officers in January 2002. Details will of course be discussed in our General Body meeting tonight.

1. A biannual PSN Newsletter was initiated and so far, six issues have been published.
2. Pakistan Journal of Nematology has been entered into exchange programme of various international journals and societies and 8 journals are being received at NNRC. Nematologists around the country are encouraged to benefit from the resource available at NNRC.

3. Back and missing issues of Journal of Nematology published in USA have been acquired free of charge, we are grateful to the Society of Nematologists (SON) for the gesture.
4. PSN is member and Councilor of International Federation of Societies of Nematologists (IFSN) of the World and we are going to discuss in our General Body meeting the bidding for holding the next International Congress of Nematology in Pakistan in 2007 if agreed by the General Body. In this respect we need the support of institutions like University of Karachi and PARC.
5. Science of Nematology has been taken to the farmers and adaptive research trials were conducted with farmers and extension staff in Sindh and Punjab through the Farmer Field School approach. For that the Society and NNRC are grateful to the national IPM Programme of PARC and the "FAO-EU IPM Programme for Cotton in Asia", a six country Regional Project of FAO of the United Nations. This afternoon, I shall be giving a presentation entitled, "Farmer Field Schools: A Tool for Farmer Education and Rural Development". All guests particularly those from PARC and Extension are invited.
6. Availing the services of Expatriate Experts through a Government of Pakistan scheme, the Society supported NNRC to invite Dr. Muhammad Rafique Siddiqui and he is with us today. In this regard, if any other lab is interested, we would be pleased to help.

Sir, in the end, I would like to inform that we have received 68 abstracts for presentation in this conference and some posters will also be displayed.

With this I thank you all very much for patient listening.

God Bless you!