Mr Andrea de Felip, Chargé d'Affaires, Embassy of Italy

Distinguished speakers

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning, and welcome to the inaugural Singapore-Italy Joint Symposium on Biomedical Sciences!

For those who were at the concert last night, I am sure you will agree with me that that was a splendid way to set the tone for this first symposium.

I am very pleased to see so many of you participating in this Symposium.

This brings together the biomedical research community from Singapore and Italy.

In fact, I am most impressed that this Symposium could be organized so soon after the Memorandum of Intent between A*STAR and the Region of Lombardia was signed in Milan in April this year.
I have personally visited the host institutions of the 11 Italian scientific speakers who are here, namely the University of Milan, University of Milano-Bicocca, IFOM-IEO and the San Raffaele Scientific Institute, and I am happy to see this group of distinguished scientists here in Singapore.

A*STAR's ties with Italy have increased significantly after we recruited Prof Paola Castagnoli to be the Scientific Director of the Singapore Immunology Network in 2007.

Indeed, this Symposium would not have been possible without Paola, and I would like to commend her and other members of the Scientific Organising Committee who have made this Symposium possible.

We even have a “Little Italy” in Biopolis now, with Italian scientists such as Paola, Ernesto Guccione and Antonio Bertoletti, and a growing number of Italian post-docs and students¹.

I am sure there will be more in the future.

Afterall, one of the fastest growth restaurant in Singapore is Italian Restaurants including Pietrasanta, just down the road.

Milan also has a growing number of Singapore students – in March this year, I met with 4 Singaporeans who are doing their PhD studies in Milan at the University of Milano-Bicocca, IFOM-IEO and the San Raffaele Scientific Institute.

¹ There are 2 Italian post-docs, 2 SINGA and 2 SIPGA students.
In fact, all of them did research at A*STAR before they went to Milan for their PhD studies, and one of them is the daughter of Dr Byrappa Venkatesh, a PI at IMCB who is known for his work in Fugu and elephant shark genomics, and is now one of the lead scientists in the international Genome 10K Project.

It is wonderful to see that we have young people in both places – Singapore and Milan - they are the future bridges that will bring the two research communities together.

I am also glad to note that there are already several joint scientific projects between the A*STAR biomedical research institutes such as IMCB, GIS and SLgN, and institutes in Milan.

In response to the Region of Lombardia’s recent call for joint proposals, there were 4 applications for joint projects between scientists in Italy and Singapore. This is very encouraging, and I am sure that the Symposium will open up even greater opportunities for further collaboration, and strengthen the networks between the two research communities.

As you know, Singapore is a relatively young player in the Biomedical Sciences, having embarked on this initiative in a big way only in 2000.
But with the commitment of the government, we have moved quickly to establish Singapore as one of the leading biomedical sciences hubs around the world today.

Though it has been less than a decade, we have made significant advances in terms of scientific impact, built up a suite of research capabilities across the value chain from basic to translational & clinical research, and excellent infrastructure.

But most importantly, we have built up the human capital by attracting international talent, as well as training our local talent.

We now have a biomedical research community of 900 in A*STAR, and another 500 of our young scholars are being trained in biomedical sciences research here and abroad.

Of the biomedical research community in A*STAR, 60% of them come from nearly 50 countries, making us one of the most international biomedical sciences hubs. In fact, the fastest growing group of scientists now comes from Europe.

We also see a good mix of international and local talent among the biomedical companies that are located in Biopolis – about 400 researchers work in the corporate laboratories of Abbott, GlaxoSmithKline, Lilly, Novartis, Schering-Plough, Takeda and Forma Therapeutics here at Biopolis.
Industry has also taken strong interest in the biomedical research that we do at A*STAR, and we now have major research partnerships with pharmaceutical companies such as Abbott and Schering-Plough.

In addition, we are collaborating with smaller innovative biotech companies, including Humalys, Cytos and others to develop new technology platforms, as well as advance the discovery and development of new drugs and biologics.

In closing, I would like to encourage our Italian guests to look for collaborative opportunities with our A*STAR and Singapore researchers.

I am sure you will hear more about the exciting research taking place in our institutes over the next 2 days, and how we are working closely with the clinical community and industry in order to translate discoveries from the bench to the bedside.

Apart from research, I also hope you will consider opportunities to work with us on PhD training and research attachments for Italian students.

We already have a research attachment programme with the University of Milano-Bicocca, and we welcome more students from Italy for similar research attachments with us.

To all participants of the Symposium, I wish you all an enriching and fruitful time.

Thank you.