

THEMES OF GOLDEN JUBILEE (2007-2009) SPEECHES AND INTERVIEWS BY HIS HIGHNESS THE AGA KHAN

In his speeches between 2000 and the start of his Golden Jubilee Celebrations in July 2007, His Highness the Aga Khan drew attention to critical factors that impact, positively or negatively, the development of peaceful, progressive, enlightened societies, particularly in the 21st century. Among the key factors he highlighted were pluralism, conflicts, poverty, civil society institutions, the corporate sector, political governance, ethics and integrity, the Clash of Ignorance, education, and the media. All, he explained, are interrelated and "*mutually reinforcing*"; that is, none exists in a vacuum.

In contrast to his earlier addresses, the Aga Khan's Golden Jubilee speeches and interviews stressed new themes including:

- the nature of poverty and poverty-alleviation;
- exploiting Islam's cultural assets to foster pluralism, address the Clash of Ignorance, and alleviate poverty,
- responses to forces, pressures, and issues of contemporary life;
- the value of collaborative partnerships and regional perspectives in development activity;
- Islam's values of ethics and personal responsibility, its reconciliation of faith with intellect, and the need for the West to accept them.

Poverty and quality of life of the ultra-poor and aged rank high among the Aga Khan's overriding concerns. During the Golden Jubilee, he not only initiated new programmes to deal with these issues, but also provided the interpretation of specific principles and ethics of Islam that had guided his responses to these issues.

The Nature of Poverty and Poverty-Alleviation

The Aga Khan explains that in Islam, the objective of poverty-alleviation programmes, and, more generally, all forms of generosity, is to help individuals enjoy the dignity of self-sufficiency and independence.

[Charity] is a word that we do not like. Islam has a very clear message about the different forms of generosity. There is that with regard to the poor, which takes the form of gifts. But the recipient remains poor. There exists a second form of generosity that contributes to growing the independence of the person. This concept, in which the goal is to make the person the master of their destiny, is the most beneficial in the eyes of Allah. (2)

Our duty is to try to free people from poverty. And to me, poverty means being ... without hope of ever controlling one's own destiny. This means condemning one's children and grandchildren to unacceptable living conditions. (1)

He stresses that a correct understanding of poverty and its causes is fundamental to sound poverty-alleviation programmes:

Overcoming these problems will require a searching re-examination of what poverty really means. (3) We need to establish an exact diagnosis of poverty, a concept which is still poorly understood. (2) I am increasingly inclined to define poverty not only as a matter of income, but rather as a state of marginalisation in all of those conditions which contribute to the quality of human life. A state of poverty is a state of deprivation with respect to health and nutrition, education and security, housing and credit, and all the other conditions which are essential to human well-being. (3) We think [poverty] is comprised of a societal phenomenon, characterised by a lack of access. (2)

The Aga Khan suggests that "lack of access" is a form of poverty itself and a central characteristic of generational poverty:

We're worried about another form of poverty, which is lack of access. We're beginning to sense the lack of access in society for the ultra-poor is one of the things that defines poverty from one generation to the next. People simply don't have access to the social support systems that a normal individual would have. Therefore it's not only material poverty, it's actually quality of life poverty, and that is a dramatic situation. (4)

Indeed, a correct diagnosis of poverty is so fundamental, it will, the Aga Khan explains, enable a "vast programme" to address it within just two to three years (as of July 2007):

If we establish the correct diagnosis -- we are currently conducting an in depth study in five Asian countries -- we will be able to put in place within two to three years a vast programme to fight poverty which will not be limited to the Ismaili community. (2)

By appreciating the depth of these two considerations -- that poverty is fundamentally a lack of access and that generosity should facilitate independence, one can fully appreciate the notion of the "Enabling Environment," (a term the Aga Khan coined 25 years ago in Nairobi), in particular, that Enabling Environments create opportunities.

[Enabling Environments have] been a central theme of my Imamati; (5) that many developing countries of Africa and Asia could one day become countries of opportunity ... is precisely the objective that I have been pursuing during

the past 50 years. (6) The [Enabling Environment] concept [grew] out of my impatience with overly simple myths about how development really works. The term "Enabling Environment" reminds us that the full context of interacting forces must be brought together if sustainable development is to be achieved. The term also recognises that even the right environment is still only an enabling condition -- not a sufficient one.... A sound enabling environment must create a favourable framework in which people's energy and creativity can be motivated, mobilised and rewarded, (3) [where] individuals can make the best possible use of their own personal gifts. (5) In the end, human progress must grow out of human inspiration and endeavour. (3)

Throughout the Jubilee year, the Aga Khan characterised the Aga Khan Development Network's interventions as initiatives that create opportunity -- not just economic opportunity but a broader perspective that addresses "lack of access" generally. He explained that the Academies programme creates the opportunity for talented, underprivileged individuals to prepare for global citizenship and aspire to leadership positions:

Above all else, [will be an] uncompromising commitment to Quality -- in every aspect of the Academy experience. Our hallmark will be quality students, quality instructors, quality facilities -- an unwavering devotion to world-class standards. Let the day be long past when some could excuse mediocrity by saying that it was "good enough for Africa." (7)

Too many of those who ought to be effective leaders in years to come are being left behind in the here and now. Because good schools are not available to them early in life, they are often excluded from such opportunities as they grow older. (21)

Citing the International Baccalaureate programme of the Academies, the Aga Khan suggests that even rural development interventions should seek to make world class educational opportunities available:

What would it mean for example for the IB program to work in largely rural societies - where there have never been the resources or incentives to support serious and sustained education? (17)

Similarly, the Aga Khan explains one of the key objectives of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture "is to increase the beneficiaries' independence (8) improve quality of life and create opportunities for the ultra poor" (9):

We have placed culture at the heart of the development puzzle. (2)

We found that to affect a large population, a project of rehabilitation and reconstruction must take into account a district and not just this or that building alone, important as that is culturally. We are also convinced that the renewal of the habitat is in itself insufficient, and must be combined with a rehabilitation of public spaces, medical services and schools, by using all the tools of modern finance, including micro-credit and micro-insurance. (10)

Experience has taught us that rehabilitation or reconstruction of a district is itself a source of economic renewal. In other words, a population whose habitat has been improved regenerates its own economic environment. We made the crucial observation that renewal of habitat, as part of a cultural approach, has perennial benefit especially for the poorest. (10)

Creating opportunity extends to the economic arena, where the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development's mandate is to act as "an agent of change and growth - from Afghanistan to Tajikistan, from Mozambique to Mali" (11) by encouraging "economic progress in developing countries and those undergoing post-conflict reconstruction." (1) The Aga Khan's expectation for AKFED's \$800 million Bujagali power project in Uganda is for it to become a spark that will "propel a great chain of positive developments" (11) in a country where "only five percent of the total population ... and only one percent of the rural population, have access to the grid supply of electric power." (11) Similarly, he hopes the new Serena Hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan, will be "a tangible example of confidence in the future can help trigger an upward spiral of hope and renewal." (3)

Even AKDN's long term, generational focus is a catalyst for generating opportunity, for the mere presence of AKDN in a region creates confidence that attracts other investors and players:

We function very differently [from NGOs]! We [are in it for the long run], whereas it is not rare to see an NGO start-up in a country and leave five days later. (2) My hope is that the commitment we are announcing today [the \$700 million Aga Khan University expansion in East Africa] will encourage other private initiatives, while also encouraging educators from the public sector to welcome private institutions as complementary players rather than as competitive ones. (12)

Often it is not appreciated that opportunity is itself, in essence, a gift from Allah that provides sustenance, and, as with all blessings, we have an obligation to share it, but not just by charity, but by creating opportunity for others. To this end the Aga Khan advises:

*The search for justice and security, **the struggle for equality of opportunity**, the quest for tolerance and harmony, the pursuit of human dignity -- these are*

moral imperatives which we must work and think about on a daily basis.
(emphasis added) (15)

Paralleling the Holy Qur'an: *"Now those who have been more favoured do not give their sustenance to those whom their right hands possess **so that they may be equal therein.**"*
(emphasis added) (Holy Qur'an 16:71)

Solutions, the Aga Khan explains, require a *"voluntarist and innovative strategy ... to break [the] chain of despair and total imprisonment"* (1) of those trapped in generational poverty:

We live in a world in which there is increasingly more information that people can employ. The question is, how we access it and how we employ it.... One of the ways to solve the problem is through institutional and human enablement, so that society can create its own knowledge base, through universities, research, etc. Sharing time and knowledge is saying that I will make the knowledge that I have available to those people who, otherwise, would not have access to it. One would make it available in such a form that this knowledge could be employed in building capacities for the future, which can happen in many different forms: joint research, teachers teaching in a school over a couple of years in order to increase the quality in teaching mathematics, financial institutions that develop products for microfinance. I would [also] like to see the employment of time and knowledge in areas which we desperately need. One of these is government. The constitutionality of the developing world is one of the fundamental weaknesses. (28)

The spirit of Islam is to share knowledge and I always tell the community not to think in material terms. Think in terms of knowledge and think what you can offer our institutions in various parts of the world. (9) I would like therefore to use this opportunity of the Golden Jubilee to encourage knowledge transfers, not only gifts of money. We have already received a fantastic reaction from youth educated in the industrialised countries, who are ready to share their knowledge and to come and work in our institutions throughout the third-world for lengthier durations. These are fabulous gifts and they are also an act of faith. The ethic of Islam rests on this generosity. (2)

Exploiting Islam's Cultural Assets

Although the Aga Khan places reviving culture *"at the heart of the development puzzle"*(2), he also views restoration of cultural assets as a key tool of efforts to promote dialogue and understanding about Islam:

We don't do enough to illustrate to the peoples of our world the greatness of the Islamic civilisations of cultures of the past ... to illustrate to the peoples of our world, the history of the civilisations of the Ummah.... Because they don't know our history, they don't know our literature, they don't know our philosophy, they don't know the physical environment in which our countries have lived, they view the Ummah in terminology which is completely wrong. (29)

Islamic cultures have immense power and immense opportunity. It is up to us Muslims to illustrate those civilisations, those cultures of the past and the present and one of the ways to do so is to revive the effectiveness of cultural assets in communicating to people. Cultural assets can and should become contributors to cultural dialogue, to cultural understanding, pride in one's heritage and make an economic contribution to the country. Cultural assets speak to people. If we want to bridge the gulf of misunderstanding between many countries in the Ummah and countries outside the Ummah, one of the ways to do so is to have our cultural assets speak for our history, speak for our traditions, speak for our values, speak for our ethics.(30)

Apart from specific initiatives by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and Aga Khan Museum to raise awareness of the "*greatness of the Islamic civilisations of cultures of the past*," the Ismaili Imam's "ambassadorial buildings," such as the Ismaili Centres, the Delegation of the Ismaili Imam in Ottawa, and the Aga Khan Museum currently under construction in Toronto, evolve and develop contemporary expressions of Islamic culture, attitudes, and ethics through their very nature and the sentiments these buildings are designed to evoke. The Aga Khan explains:

[The Delegation] is the third important new Canadian building with which I will have been associated over the last five years. It affirms our intent to share, within a Western setting, the best of Islamic life and heritage. This new Delegation of the Ismaili Imam, like the Ismaili Centre and the Aga Khan Museum to be built in Toronto, reflects our conviction that buildings can do more than simply house people and programmes. They can also reflect our deepest values, as great architecture captures esoteric thought in physical form. (15)

Using rock crystal's iridescent mystery as an inspiration for this building, does indeed provide an appropriate symbol of the Timelessness, the Power and the Mystery of Allah as the Lord of Creation. What we celebrate today can thus be seen as a new creative link between the spiritual dimensions of Islam and the

cultures of the West. Even more particularly, it represents another new bridge between the peoples of Islam and the peoples of Canada. (15)

Similarly, the Ismaili Centres facilitate bridge-building and understanding between Ismailis and the peoples they live among, East and West:

The creation of the Ismaili Centres is important because they represent the Ismaili community in the important countries in the world.... We call them ambassadorial buildings because they are representatives of the Ismaili community and all its aspirations.... The Ismaili Centre in Dubai will reflect a mood of humility, forward outlook, friendship and dialogue.... The buildings have a twofold purpose. First, they serve as institutions for the Ismaili community and, secondly, they reach out to groups of people, creating spaces for quality exhibitions, culture and musical representation. These centres allow us to build bridges for interaction among various communities, areas and cultures. (9)

The Aga Khan Museum will play a key role in inter-cultural education and bridge-building between Islam and the West:

The two worlds, Muslim and non-Muslim, Eastern and Western must as a matter of urgency, make a real effort to get to know one another.... While some North American museums have significant collections of Muslim art, there is no institution devoted to Islamic art. In building the museum in Toronto, we intend to introduce a new actor to the North American art scene. Its fundamental aim will be an educational one, to actively promote knowledge of Islamic arts and culture. What happens on that continent, culturally, economically and politically, cannot fail to have world-wide repercussions -- which is why we thought it important that an institution capable of promoting understanding and tolerance should exist there. (16)

To this end, the Aga Khan explains the museum's collection will firstly "highlight objects drawn from every region and every period, and created from every kind of material in the Muslim world." (16) That is, as part of the museum's efforts to expose its audiences to Islam's cultural diversity and tolerance, the collection will showcase the finest objects created by artisans -- not necessarily Muslim -- from the Muslim world, and expose its audiences to Islam's magnificent intellectual tradition:

The Muslim world has always been wide open to every aspect of human existence. The sciences, society, art, the oceans, the environment and the cosmos have all contributed to the great moments in the history of Muslim civilisations. The Qur'an itself repeatedly recommends Muslims to become

better educated in order better to understand God's creation. Our collection seeks to demonstrate the openness of Muslim civilisations to every aspect of human life, even going so far as to work in partnership with intellectual and artistic sources originating in other regions. (16)

The Western education system is another forum the Aga Khan stresses as vital in the effort to rectify misconceptions about Islam:

[T]he globalization of the knowledge of the cultures of the Umma is critical. We have to make known the cultural inheritance of the Muslims to the non-Muslim as well as the Muslim parts of the world because we will never succeed in building the respect and recognition that the Umma deserves unless we present the Umma as a remarkable carrier of civilisation. (9)

The misconceptions about Islam and Muslims in the West exist because we are, even today, absent from the global civilisation. We should encourage the Western education system to bring in knowledge of the civilisation of Islam into the secondary education system. (9)

In comments to Western media and the International Baccalaureate organization, he elaborated further on the role Western educational institutions can play in ameliorating the Clash of Ignorance:

[Western] educational institutions are recognising the fact that they -- quite logically, it's not criticism -- were born in a Judaeo-Christian society or Judaeo-Christian environment. That environment had nothing to do with the Islamic world -- it wasn't even aware of it at the time that these institutions came into existence. So I don't think it's up to us to turn round and point fingers. I don't like that attitude at all. (4)

What I do think is that these institutions must accept the fact we're living in a different world, and the definition of an educated person today will be different from an educated person 100 years ago in Judaeo-Christian society. So, fine, we have to encourage a better understanding, a better knowledge, of what's happening. (4)

What I would hope, however, is that the opening of this knowledge domain is not aimed at sustaining a particular attitude or interpretation of faith or culture from the Islamic world. The Islamic world is very, very pluralist and, to me, what is important is that the industrialised world should understand that pluralism. (4)

There are so many forces at play that tend to make that difficult for you [in the West]. First of all, you refer to the Muslim world - have you ever heard a Muslim refer to the Christian world? (4)

In the years ahead, should we not expect a student at an IB school in Atlanta to know as much about Jomo Kenyatta or Muhammad Ali Jinnah as a student in Mombasa or Lahore knows about Atlanta's great son, the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr.? Should a Bangladeshi IB student reading the poems of Tagore at the Aga Khan Academy in Dhaka not also encounter the works of other Nobel Laureates in Literature such as the Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk or America's William Faulkner or Toni Morrison? (17)

Should the study of medieval architecture not include both the Chartres Cathedral in France and the Mosque of Djenné in Mali? And shouldn't IB science students not learn about Ibn al-Haytham, the Muslim scholar who developed modern optics, as well as his predecessors Euclid and Ptolemy, whose ideas he challenged. (17)

Responding to Forces and Issues of Contemporary Life

Contemporary life stresses society in many ways at all levels. In particular, the Aga Khan highlights three issues deserving attention: coping with accelerating change; guarding culture and diversity in a homogenising world, and care of the aged.

I. Issues of contemporary life: Coping with the increasing pace of change

Exponential increases in knowledge are the stimulant driving today's mind-bending pace of change that challenges all levels of society because, as the Aga Khan explains, change is the inevitable response to new knowledge, though it may initially be resisted:

New forms of knowledge are resisted because they change society ... (4) We are moving into a new epoch of history, a new condition of human life. Many observers describe this new world as the Knowledge Society. In this new era, the predominant source of influence will stem from information, intelligence and insight rather than physical power or natural resources. (18)

Consequently, in this meritocratic society, leadership and competitive advantage will flow to the knowledgeable. Thus, the personal and commercial segments of society create a feedback loop, fuelling the rate of change, as they attempt to remain both competitive and relevant with even newer knowledge.

As the pace of history accelerates, developments that occurred over fifty years in my lifetime will happen in fifteen or even five years for your generation.

This is why I believe that the most important thing you could have mastered in the course of your studies ... was not any specific body of knowledge, but rather the ability to go on learning (20) [for] in an age of accelerating change, even the most sophisticated skills are quickly outdated. (17) [A]gility and adaptability have become more important qualities than mere size or strength, and the race of life has gone increasingly to the nimble and the knowledgeable. (19)

In particular, preparing the next generation of graduates who will enter this dynamic situation will require revised educational objectives:

As world affairs have been steadily transformed by the process of globalization, the ability to command and control has become less important than the ability to anticipate, connect and respond. (21) What is required today, in my view, is an educational approach which is the polar opposite of indoctrination - one that nurtures the spirit of anticipation and agility, adaptability and adventure. (7) And educational institutions which can instil and enhance those capacities have become essential to effective development. (21)

If the Aga Khan Academies are to fulfil their mission, they must work in these pragmatic directions. To this end, the Academies curriculum seeks to instil a habit of intellectual humility which constantly opens young minds to what it is that they do not know, and which sends them on a wide and rigorous search for new knowledge. (21) [W]e will provide thorough preparation in subjects such as science and mathematics, developing the habits of rigorous reasoning and searching inquiry. (23)

To students yet to enter this world, to those of us already trying to cope, and to entire nations, the Aga Khan advises that "*as the pace of change accelerates, it is clear that the human mind and heart will be the central factors in determining social wealth.*" (17) He elaborates:

[Although] there is nothing we can do to slow the pace of change, but we can hope help steer its direction. (20) An important thing is looking forward across time, rather than being in a reactive mode. The reactive mode is a tremendous liability. Being in an anticipatory mode changes the whole nature of things, and the longer you have to change things, the better chance you have of making it work. (4)

In a world of rapid change, an agile and adaptable mind, a pragmatic and co-operative temperament, a strong ethical orientation - these are increasingly

the keys to effective leadership. And I would add to this list a capacity for intellectual humility which keeps one's mind constantly open to a variety of viewpoints and which welcomes pluralistic exchange. These capacities, over the longer term, will be critically important to the developing world. (17)

As the economic arena has been globalizing, openness and flexibility have become prerequisites for progress, and success has gone more and more to those who can connect and respond. (19)

The fact that history moves at an accelerating pace is both challenge and an opportunity. I remember how people 50 years ago carelessly referred to many of the developing economies as hopeless "basket cases", including places that have taken off since - like India and China. As history demonstrates, so-called backward places can move forward time. It is not unrealistic to plan for progress. (20)

[The Ummah] must become full and even leading participants in the Knowledge Society of the 21st Century. That will mean embracing the values of collaboration and co-ordination, openness and partnership, choice and diversity - which will under-gird the Knowledge Society, learning constantly to review and revise and renew what we think we know - learning how to go on learning. (18)

2. Issues of contemporary life: Impacts on culture and diversity

The unrelenting drive of contemporary life provokes changes pressuring virtually every aspect of culture. The Aga Khan highlights two in particular: the fear of modernism, especially in the Islamic world, and the need to balance culturally-homogenising globalism with countervailing efforts.

With respect to the first, the Aga Khan says:

There is a danger, in every area of life, everywhere in the world, that people will respond to the hastening pace of change with an irrational fear of modernism, and will want to embrace uncritically that which has gone before. The Islamic world has sometimes been vulnerable to this temptation - and the rich potential for a new "Islamic modernism" has sometimes been underestimated. (24)

Addressing this issue, the Aga Khan explains the Aga Khan Museum will serve "to clarify certain aspects of the history of Muslim civilisations in order that today's two main

tendencies, modern and traditional, can base their ideas on historical realities and not history that has been misunderstood or even manipulated." (16)

With respect to globalization, the Aga Khan warns us to remain vigilant and proactive to the homogenising pressures it puts on culture, diversity, and pluralism:

Those groups that seek to standardize, homogenize, or if you will allow me, to normalise all that and those around them must be actively resisted through countervailing activities. (22)

[Globalization] brings with it both myriad blessings and serious risks - not the least of which is the danger that globalization will become synonymous with homogenisation. (17) The great problem of humankind in a global age will be to balance and reconcile the two impulses of which I have spoken: the quest for distinctive identity and the search for global coherence; (17) balancing the universal and the particular -- the global and the local -- as influences in human life. It is a challenge which becomes more important with every passing year [and] intensifying in our world. (23)

The intermixture [of local and global experiences] can give us the worst of both worlds - hostile, defensive localism on one side and a superficial homogenised mega-culture on the other. Or it can give us the best of both worlds - proud local identities living side by side with creative international co-operation. (23)

In a world that claims to be globalised, there are some who might regard cultural standardisation as natural, even desirable. For my part, I believe that marks of individual and group cultural identity generate an inner strength which is conducive to peaceful relations. I also believe in the power of plurality, without which there is no possibility of exchange. In my view, this idea is integral to the very definition of genuine quality of life. (8) Diversity and variety constitute one of the most beautiful gifts of the Creator, and because a deep commitment to our own particularity is part of what it means to be human. Yes, we need to establish connecting bonds across cultures, but each culture must also honour a special sense of self. (17)

What is required goes beyond mere tolerance or sympathy or sensitivity - emotions which can often be willed into existence by a generous soul. True cultural sensitivity is something far more rigorous, and even more intellectual than that. It implies a readiness to study and to learn across cultural barriers, an ability to see others as they see themselves. (17)

One of the great stumbling blocks to the advance of pluralism, in my view simple human arrogance. All of the world's great religions warn against righteousness - yet too many are still tempted to play God themselves rather than recognising their humility before the Divine. (20) What this challenge will ultimately require of us, is a deep sense of personal and intellectual humility, an understanding that diversity itself is a gift of the Divine, and that embracing diversity is a way to learn and to grow - not to dilute our identities but to enrich our self-knowledge. (17)

How this issue will be resolved will depend on whether we can educate future leaders ... to live creatively in such a setting. Our new programme of Aga Khan Academies is one response to that challenge. (23)

3. Issues of contemporary life: Caring for the aged

Contemporary life also stresses traditional family structures, and these pressures, combined with increased longevity, negatively impact the quality of life of the aged. Islam's ethic with respect to parents and the elderly is set out clearly in The Holy Qur'an:

Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honour. (17:23)

Consequently, the Aga Khan made addressing care of the aged a key concern:

Life span is elongating, but at the same time working life is shortening. Family bonds are being loosened and sometimes even broken by the forces of modern life. The result is that many older [Ismailis] are facing unhappy and often, lonely years ahead. We must find ways to address this problem. (6) We will try to help the aged live an honourable life. (9)

The Aga Khan explains that ongoing research with the Ismaili community has revealed that solutions will "need to harness multiple inputs because a singular input is not going to enable poor families, or the aged, to find ways out of their situations" (25) and that several pilot projects were commenced in 2009.

Developing Sound Partnerships and Maintaining Regional Perspectives

As was explained in *Themes Of Speeches By His Highness The Aga Khan (2000 -- 2007)*, this document's sister summary, both the promotion of the concept of partnership between the private sector, government, and civil society, and its tangible implementation are

central to the Aga Khan's vision and attitude. In addition to these, the Aga Khan now emphasises regional partnerships between nations in the evolving globalised, knowledge society. "[O]penness and flexibility [are the] prerequisites for progress, and success has gone more and more to those who can connect and respond" (19), which requires "embracing the values of collaboration and co-ordination, openness and partnership." (18)

Indeed, in setting out the objectives of the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat in Ottawa, the Aga Khan underscored its primary role as a facilitator of partnerships between organisations and nations:

Even against the most daunting challenges, social and economic progress can and must be a shared experience, based on a cosmopolitan ethic and nurtured by a spirit of genuine partnership.... [The Delegation] will give us another platform for strengthening and extending our relationship. It will be a site for robust dialogue, intellectual exchange, and the forging of new partnerships - with government, and with the institutions of civil society and the private sector of Canada and so many other countries.... It is our prayer that the establishment of the Delegation will provide a strongly anchored, ever-expanding opportunity for rich collaboration - in the devoted service of ancient values, in the intelligent recognition of new realities, and in a common commitment to our shared dreams of a better world. (15)

Partnerships help bring down barriers between peoples, organisations, and nations, and enhance openness, co-operation, collaboration, respect, diversity, access to expertise and knowledge, capacity, and, most importantly, dialogue. The Aga Khan illustrates from his experience in Afghanistan:

Reconstruction has its own dynamic at a certain stage. All of us are concerned in making it self-sustaining. Once it becomes self-sustaining, it tends to grow across divides. Because people look at what's happening next door, village to village or province to province, and they ask themselves "Can we get there?" And if they say, "Can we get there?" they then open immediately the question of dialogue. And that is the basis of everything. (4)

Afghanistan has a very complex geographic situation with a number of countries around it which have their own interests in what happens in Afghanistan. Therefore building - for example like we're trying to do now in the two Badakhshans - building regional stability which can come from outside the country into the provinces of the country is very important. (4)

Citing East Africa and Mozambique as another example, the Aga Khan reaffirmed his conviction in the benefits and advantages of organisations and nations to keep regional perspectives and develop partnerships:

The challenge of development must be a shared experience, one that rests on a "cosmopolitan ethic", and proceeds in a spirit of partnership. The commitment to co-operate is not only essential among peoples of different ethnic or religious backgrounds, or different classes, or philosophies. We must also build stronger bridges of co-operation between different sectors of social and economic leadership. I am pleased, for example, to be hearing more and more these days about "public/private partnerships. As we learn to work across the public/private dividing line, we can do things together we could never do separately. (26)

There is much to be gained when governments cooperate with private institutions. Governments can help provide a strong enabling environment for both private enterprise and for civil society [at the local, national and regional levels (26)]. For example, they could create common standards for civil society organizations whose work extends across national frontiers. The Aga Khan University, for instance, is planning extensive new investments in the region and common registration and accreditation policies would help facilitate this effort. (32)

It has been a hallmark of Ismaili thinking that the peoples of East Africa can often be most effective when they work and think on a region-wide basis. Many of our AKDN initiatives, in fact, have been organised, for some years now, on a region-wide basis -- and with great success. (26)

Stronger regional institutions in East Africa can do a great deal to facilitate development, but for this to happen, and for the East African Community to thrive, the spirit of partnership must also be present when governments deal with one another. (26)

We hear constantly these days about the process of "globalization" in our world. But we should note that this is also an age of enormous "regionalisation". It is happening in Europe. It is happening in Southeast Asia. It is happening in North America -- and in many other places. And, of course, it is also happening in Africa. (26)

East Africa is a place where regionalisation can have a particularly beneficial impact. It is good to know that the leaders of the five major countries of East Africa have all indicated their strong support for countries of East Africa have

all indicated their strong support for regionalisation. The moment is a promising one. (26)

Mozambique's standing as a highly regarded member of the community of nations will enable it to play an increasingly important, strategic role in relations between its neighbors to the south and its neighbors to the north - between the Southern African Development Community and the East African Community. The key ingredient in all of these efforts -- within Mozambique and in its regional neighborhood, is a spirit of genuine partnership ... (31)

And with respect to regionalism in Central Asia, the Aga Khan explains:

It is appropriate that the word "Regional" is at the centre of our deliberations on Central Asia. The countries are diverse in many ways -- and the development approaches there must be sensitive to divergent requirements. But these countries also have a common historical experience, including several centuries of shared Islamic heritage.... In this respect, the Central Asian experience parallels the European experience. In Europe, too, the end of the Cold War demanded new political and economic structures and it is striking how quickly Europe is now reaching out to Central Asia -- offering, among other things, the great gift of a powerful regional example. (3)

Among other things, the European example demonstrates that a healthy sense of national identity need not be a barrier to constructive regional engagement. So my first objective today is to tell you how warmly I endorse regional diagnosis for Central Asia. (3)

The key to building partnerships -- whether they are among social sectors, or among countries -- is a profound spirit of reciprocal obligation -- a readiness to share the work, to share the costs, to share the risks, and to share the credit. In the end, what it will require most ... is a spirit of mutual trust. (3)

Partnerships also enhance the strength of weaker nations:

You have national forces which sometimes will play for or against regional arrangements. And these regional arrangements are becoming very, very important, because in our world there are very few micro-states that survive well. OK, you can refer to Singapore, you can refer to Hong Kong. But they're the exception rather than the rule. Therefore these small states need to come together so that they can insert themselves in a wider marketplace, etc. (4)

Islam's values of ethics, personal responsibility, and reconciliation of faith with intellect

Given the wide cultural differences between the Islamic World and the West, and the pervasive misunderstanding of Islam, the *Clash of Ignorance*, the Aga Khan draws attention to Islam's highest values, in particular the importance of knowledge and intellect in the practice of faith, and the need for the West to respect them:

My concept of Islam is a faith for all time, not one [facing backwards in time].

(2) Faith and learning are also profoundly interconnected The Holy Qur'an sees the discovery of knowledge as a spiritual responsibility. (23) In the Qur'an it is written that one must seek education to know Allah better, and share knowledge for the betterment of society. That is to say that in Islam, the links between faith and knowledge are very strong and we are constantly encouraged to learn. This is an extraordinary message for humanity. (2)

The very first hereditary Imam of the Shia Muslims, Hazrat Ali Ibn Abi Talib, [elevated] knowledge as a central quality in the life of faithful Muslims. (21) Because of him, Shi'ism is an intellectual interpretation of Islam. The direct impact is the reduction of conflict between the spiritual and the temporal. (2)

[Islam does] not separate the faith and the world.... For Muslims, the separation is not possible. [We are] expected to live our faith every day, all the time.... I would like the non-Muslim societies to accept the values of Islam. If Islam says that it does not separate the world and faith, the West should accept that.... But this does not mean that we are in conflict. They are just different values.... I would go further and say: it is a wonderful way to live! It is an extraordinary blessing to live one's faith every day! (2)

So I would say the first thing [for the West] is to understand the complexities of the Muslim world. The individualities of the communities in the Muslim world. The differences of interpretation of faith in the Muslim world. The relationship between faith and state, which is very, very sensitive in the Muslim world and where you see many, many formulae today which you no longer know in the Western world. Those formulae aren't present in the Western world any more - that's gone - [but] they're still very present in the Islamic world. (4)

As modern societies slide further into materialism, diminished spiritual conviction, and increased ethical lapses among professionals, the Aga Khan reasserts the need to re-establish and re-emphasise ethics and spirituality:

Ethical lapses in medicine and education, malfeasance in business and banking, dishonesty among journalists, scientists, engineers or scholars -- all of these weaknesses can undermine the most promising democracies. (27)

The Aga Khan Academies will also have their own areas of special emphasis, including: an explicit concern for the value of pluralism [and] a strong emphasis on the ethical [and spiritual (21)] dimensions of life. (19)

In discussing individual freedoms during an interview with the Canadian press (4), the Aga Khan asserts that freedoms are not absolute, and that abused freedoms become license, which leads to a degeneration of society:

AK: We think freedom is important, of course. But we think that freedom really is not something that one has to take in the absolute. There is abuse of freedom. And when freedom is abused, what does it become?

INTERVIEWER: License, I guess.

AK: Exactly. And that's where parts of our world say "Stop!"

INTERVIEWER: In Canada, I think some of our success is the comfortable tolerance of letting people set different standards for themselves. So, yes, some people may choose license and other people choose some realistic guidelines, if you like, to exercise their freedom. Is that what you see as the goal for the broader society. or is it a little different from that?

AK: Well I think it's difficult to impose a firm line. But I think that when you look at history, the history of humankind, you will find that when freedoms have become license, society tends to desegregate. And I think that what we're seeing in the Western world is that very issue on the table, and a reversal. I think there is a reversal under way.

Freedom doesn't mean that if you want to abuse that freedom, whatever it is, you legitimise or impose that on others.

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