

HIS HIGHNESS THE AGA KHAN AND CANADA: A PROFOUND AFFINITY -- BUT WHY CANADA?

Introduction

For more than 50 years, His Highness the Aga Khan and Canada have enjoyed a robust relationship through the Aga Khan Development Network and the Ismaili Imamat that has spawned an impressive array of programmes, partnerships, institutional investments, and honours.

Counted among the AKDN's Canadian institutional partners are the Canadian International Development Agency; Alberta Aid; McGill University; McMaster University; the Universities of Toronto, Alberta, and Calgary; Assistance Medicale Internationale; Dundee Wealth Management; *The Globe and Mail*; International Development Research Centre (IDRC); Northwater Capital Management Inc.; Scotiabank, and the Wild Rose Foundation of Alberta--all of which have contributed resources totalling many tens, if not hundreds, of millions of dollars.

Investments nearing \$500 million made in Canada by the Aga Khan include funding for the Aga Khan Museum (Toronto), the Global Centre for Pluralism (Ottawa), the first Delegation for the Ismaili Imamat (Ottawa), and two high profile Ismaili Centres (Vancouver and Toronto).

State awards to the Aga Khan are among Canada's highest: honorary citizenship (he is the fifth person to receive the honour), and Companion of the Order of Canada. Other awards include honorary doctorates from McMaster University (Hamilton), McGill University, the University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and the University of Alberta.

Yet, this impressive tableau falls short of an explanation for his profound affinity and respect for Canada: an attraction rooted in shared societal values, and his confidence in Canada as an international force for good. In 1978, he noted that:

Canada [is] an international power who takes her responsibilities seriously and whose policies have never in her history been tainted by the cruder forms of colonialism, racialism or isolationism. [1]

Successful experience with democracy, civil society and pluralism are the national genius of Canada of which much of the developing world is in dire need. [19]

And in 1992, while Canada was in the midst of a constitutional crisis, the Aga Khan brought the issue into perspective by urging Canadians to reflect on their social qualities, often taken for granted and unappreciated:

[A]s you continue your search for the best constitutional solution to your future, ... let me emphasise that Canada remains for the rest of the world an enviable haven. A haven of peace, and of immense natural beauty and wealth. The wealth I speak of, is not merely its natural resources but the peoples of Canada, steeped in your tradition of tolerance, generosity and compassion in alleviating human suffering and respect for diversity of thought and culture. [2]

These assets -- especially Canada's investment in, and commitment to, pluralism -- are so rare and valuable, they not only set Canada apart, but are crucial to the world:

*Canada is a country that has invested in making this potential liability [of pluralism] become an asset, and I think that Canada has been perhaps too humble in its own appreciation of this global asset. **It's a global asset**, and few countries, if any have been as successful as Canada has. [3] (Emphasis original)*

It's an extraordinary global asset that Canadians have not necessarily seen. [Canadians] are a humble people. They don't want to teach other people lessons that the other people don't want to learn. But we have an opportunity here [to spread the Canadian formula around the world]. [20]

[O]ne of the questions facing Canada is going to be: What is Canada's new position in relation to [the new regional blocks forming amongst nations states]? ... I think that Canada has so many assets to offer ... that it will be welcome in a number of these constructs in one form or the other. So I think [Canadians] have enormous international opportunity and it's really for you to take what you want to take. [15]

The question inevitably asked of the Aga Khan, perhaps most often by Canadians themselves, is: "Why Canada?" The remainder of this document sets out a key pillar of the Aga Khan's global vision for global harmony, and explains how and why Canada is a key component in the realization of this vision.

The Three P's of Humanity: Pluralism, Poverty, and Peace (or Progress)

To understand the depth of the Aga Khan's affinity with Canada, one first needs to understand the depth of his commitment to pluralism, because the former is predicated on the latter. For the Aga Khan, pluralism is not just as an ethical, shared human value, but a necessary prerequisite for world peace, stable democratic governance, and sustainable development. In short:

Pluralism is no longer simply an asset or a prerequisite for progress and development, it is vital to our existence. [4]

The Aga Khan elaborates:

The effective world of the future will be one of pluralism, a world that understands, appreciates and builds on diversity. [5] The rejection of pluralism is pervasive across the globe and plays a significant role in breeding destructive conflicts. Examples are scattered across the world's map: in Asia, in the Middle East, in Africa, in Europe, in the Americas. No continent has been spared from the tragedies of death, of misery and of the persecution of minorities. [10]

*[In the last 15 years, nearly two thirds of the world's conflicts] have occurred in the developing countries of Asia and Africa. More than 80 per cent were internal conflicts, either full-blown civil wars or state-sanctioned aggression against minorities in those countries. **In nearly every instance, these internal conflicts were predictable** because they were the culmination of a gradual deterioration in pluralist, inclusive governance. [5] (Emphasis added)*

Given the predictability of almost every one of these conflicts, rooted in the rejection of pluralism, the Aga Khan notes:

Is the onus not on leadership, in all parts of the world, to build a knowledge base about such situations and consider strategies for preventing them? [10]

[W]hat can be done about them, to pre-empt the risk that the rejection of pluralism will become the spark that sets human conflict aflame? [10] What is being done to support this key value for society and for democracy in Asia and Africa, to pre-empt catastrophe, rather than simply respond to it? [5]

The best way to manage change, whether positive or negative, is to anticipate it and prepare for it. [14] An important thing is looking forward across time, rather than being in a reactive mode [which] 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. [13]

However, a pluralist civic disposition, the Aga Khan observes, is a learned value:

I don't believe these societies are born into the acceptance of pluralism. I think societies get educated about pluralism. I think young children can be educated without even it being a process -- to recognise and accept people of different backgrounds, of different faiths, etc. [6] Pluralism has to be omnipresent in civil society ... it's got to be part of the way a society is constituted. [7]

*[P]luralist societies are not accidents of history. They are a product of enlightened education and continuous investment by governments and all of civil society in recognising and celebrating the diversity of the world's peoples. [5] **For pluralism, in essence, is a deliberate set of choices** that a society must make if it is to avoid costly conflict and harness the power of its diversity in solving human problems. [12] (Emphasis added)*

- *Is it not high time -- perhaps even past time, that a systematic effort be undertaken to document "best practices" by looking closely at the array of public policies and structures that support pluralism in particular national settings?*
- *As lessons are extracted and models identified, should not a process be put in place to share them widely for replication?*
- *Should not this effort reach out to as many countries as possible, and in as many organisational and institutional settings as can be mobilised?[8]*

To this end, the Aga Khan conceived of, and in partnership with the Government of Canada, founded the Global Centre of Pluralism in Ottawa. He explains its proactive mission:

The Aga Khan Development Network intends to help create some permanent institutional capacity to address this critical issue through a Global Centre for Pluralism. It will be based in Ottawa to draw from Canada's successful record in constructing and sustaining pluralist civil society. [5]

I hope that this centre will learn from the Canadian history of pluralism, the bumpy road that all societies have in dealing with pluralist problems, the outcomes, and offer much of the world new thoughts, new ways of dealing with issues, anticipating the problems that can occur . [3]

*The centre will work closely with governments and with academia and civil society around the world. The centre will seek to foster legislation and policy to strengthen developing countries' capacity for enhancing pluralism in all spheres of modern life: including law, justice, the arts, the media, financial services, health and education. **I believe leadership everywhere must continuously work to ensure that pluralism, and all its benefits, become top global priorities.** [5] For, I deeply believe that our collective conscience must accept that pluralism is no less important than human rights for ensuring peace, successful democracy and a better quality of life. [10] (Emphasis added)*

Though the challenge is not insignificant, the Aga Khan believes it is immensely supported by the human spirit's inherent predisposition towards peace and conciliation:

We often determine 'who we are'-- by determining who we are against. This fragmenting impulse not only separates peoples from one another, it also subdivides communities -- and then it subdivides the subdivisions. It leads to what some have called the "fraying" of society -- in which communities come to resemble a worn out cloth -- as its tight weave separates into individual strands. [11]

But the human inclination to divisiveness is accompanied, I deeply believe, by a profound human impulse to bridge divisions. And often the more secure we are in our own identities, the more effective we can be in reaching out to others. [11]

*If our animosities are born out of fear, then confident generosity is born out of hope. One of the central lessons I have learned after a half century of working in the developing world is that **the replacement of fear by hope is probably the single most powerful trampoline of progress.** [11] (Emphasis added)*

Even in the poorest and most isolated communities, we have found that decades, if not centuries, of angry conflict can be turned around by giving people reasons to work together toward a better future -- in other words, by giving them reasons to hope. And when hope takes root, then a new level of tolerance is possible, though it may have been unknown for years, and years, and years. [11]

Thus, the Aga Khan advises:

*[It is] my conviction that the strengthening of institutions supporting pluralism is as critical for the welfare and progress of human society as are poverty alleviation and conflict prevention. In fact **all three are intimately related.... The actions to enhance pluralism have to be matched in the developing world by programmes to alleviate poverty** because, left alone, poverty will provide a context for special interests to pursue their goals in aggressive terms. [8] That is why I passionately view the struggle against poverty, and respect for the values of pluralism, as two of the most significant tests of whether the 21st Century is to be an era of global peace, stability and progress. [9] (Emphasis added)*

Pluralism, the Aga Khan explains, is a fundamental value necessary for democracy and sustainable development:

[D]emocracy cannot function reasonably without two preconditions. The first is a healthy, civil society... The second precondition is pluralism. [10] I put it to you that no human development initiative can be sustainable unless we are successful in achieving three essential conditions:

- *First, we must operate in an environment that invests in, rather than seeks to stifle, pluralism and diversity.*

- *Second, we must have an extensive and engaged civil society.*
- *And third, we must have stable and competent democratic governance.*

These three conditions are mutually reinforcing. Taken together, they allow developing societies gradually to become masters of the process and make that process self sustainable. [5]

Why Canada?

In his 2005 and 2006 CBC interviews with Alison Smith and Peter Mansbridge respectively, the Aga Khan was asked: "Why Canada?" "What is the quality that you most admire about this country?" He replied:

*Canada is a country that has invested in making this potential liability [of pluralism] become an asset, and I think that Canada has been perhaps too humble in its own appreciation of this global asset. **It's a global asset**, and few countries, if any have been as successful as Canada has. [3] (Emphasis original)*

***Of all the developed countries that I know, [Canada has committed herself] infinitely more than anybody else to this exercise....** [Canadians] talk about it as a work in progress. They are right. It is always going to be a work in progress. And I think that you have accumulated experience over decades which we really can learn from. [6] (Emphasis added)*

[Canada is] a pluralist society that has invested in building pluralism where communities from all different backgrounds, faiths are happy. [It is a] modern country that deals with modern issues and not running away from them -- dealing with the tough ones. [And, it has] a global commitment to values, to Canadian values, which are I think are very important. [3]

Asked how Canada could help Afghanistan, the Aga Khan stated that Canada's experience and knowledge were vital for addressing global issues:

*Let me dive in because I want to say to you something which to me is profoundly important with regard to the developing world ... **Canada is today the most successful pluralist society on the face of our world. Without any doubt in my mind. You have created the perfect pluralist society** where minorities, generally speaking, are welcome, they feel comfortable, they assimilate the Canadian psyche, they are allowed to move forward within civil society in an equitable manner, their children are educated. So Canada has succeeded in putting together a form of pluralist society which has been remarkably successful. I'm not the one who's making a judgement. Look at the*

international evaluation of Canada as a country and the way it functions. [17]
(Emphasis added)

So what I'm saying is that Canada has succeeded in an area where the developing world has one of its greatest needs -- how do you build a pluralist civil society in the developing world. Look at Africa. Look at Asia. Look at most of these countries which you and I observe every day. What are one of the characteristics -- the inability of different groups to live together in peace, in a constructive environment to build civil society. And whether it's the tribal conflicts of Africa, whether it's the religious conflicts of Asia, whether it's the political conflicts in various countries, so many of them come back to the basic premise of people who cannot live together because the psyche, the notion, the acceptance, the legitimacy of pluralist human society has not established itself in the public domain. [17]

And I think Canada is really a country which has a remarkable opportunity to share its experience. I'm not suggesting that you go around saying "we've got it right and you guys have got it wrong", what I'm suggesting is we need to learn how you've done it. We need to know, and the best people to tell us are going to be people from our own backgrounds who are living in Canada. They're the ones who I think are going to be the best articulators of this. But, so that's the question, the answer to the question it's rather long, I'm sorry, but what can Canada do -- that is something unique to Canada. It is an amazing, global, human asset. [17]

I met with Hamid Karzai in London some time ago, then two days ago [January 2002] in Washington, I've met with Dr. Abdullah Abdullah many, many times, the Foreign Minister, and I think these senior Afghans are deeply conscious of the fractures and the fissures within Afghani society. They are well aware that rebuilding Afghanistan is going to need time, it's going to need finding equitable solutions to development opportunities, development problems. And I know because Chairman Karzai actually said it to me [2 days ago], that Canada is a country where the pluralism of society and the successful management of that pluralism is something which he and others in Afghanistan will be looking at. [17] (Emphasis added)

The Aga Khan expressed hope that Canada would share its knowledge and successful pluralistic experience:

I'd like to see Canada more vigorous in internationalisation of your knowledge of a pluralist society, because it's not an accident in Canada. You see, societies are not pluralist by accident. They're pluralist by the will of the government, of the people, of civil society but there is a will. At least that's my view. And you have made that a fundamental principle of the Canadian identity. Immigrants into this country know that. They recognise it, they see it, they sense it. Today I'll be commenting [to Prime Minister

Harper] on the fact that when my community came here they weren't only immigrants they were encouraged to keep their social structures, their economic structures, their relationships among families. In how many other countries do you know that happening? So there's a massive accumulated quantity of knowledge and experience here. [15]

However, the Aga Khan strikes a cautionary note against unlicensed freedom masquerading as legitimatised pluralism:

Don Cayo (Vancouver Sun): 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?

The Aga Khan: 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 disaggregate. 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. [13]

The Aga Khan comments further on the rapport between Ismailis and Canadian society, and the ripple effect Canadian society has on its immigrants:

One of the principal reasons, I believe, for the great rapport between the Ismaili and Canadian communities through the years is our shared commitment to a common ethical framework -- and especially to the ideals of pluralism. By this I mean not only social pluralism, which embraces a diversity of ethnic and religious groups, but also pluralism in our thinking about government, and pluralism in our approach to other institutions. One of the reasons governments have failed in highly diverse settings around the world is that dogma has too often been enshrined at the price of more flexible, pluralistic approaches to political and economic challenges. [16]

You have given [Ugandan refugees] the wherewithal [for some] to return to their countries in due course and bring back to Africa, bring back to Asia ... the pluralism, the values of Canada, the knowledge society that you have created here in Canada.... Knowledge in its purest form is often abrasive. When this knowledge comes into these societies it creates difficulties, creates reactions because the societies are not prepared for pure knowledge. What Canada has done is it has humanised that knowledge. [18]

On Canada's Response to the Ugandan Asian Crisis of 1972

Ironically, the Ismailis' permanent settlement in Canada, and the fruits of that settlement now making themselves felt both in Canada and the world, were born from racial discrimination, and are poignant reminders of the kind of tragedy that can be inflicted upon a people when pluralism is not valued, or worse, is feared.

The Aga Khan elaborates on Canada's response to the Ugandan crisis:

[In 1972] an African dictator -- Idi Amin -- broke all norms of civilised behaviour when he expelled all the Asians from Uganda, because they were Asian. Citizens or not, Sikhs, Hindus, Shia and Sunni Muslims, and others, all were stripped of their rights and belongings. Amongst them were many Ismailis. [2]

Most Ismailis came here stateless, destitute and almost literally with only the clothes they stood up in. Canada was the first of several countries to recognise this as the immense human tragedy it actually represented. [1] Under the leadership of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, and expressing habits of mind and spirit which have long been central to the Canadian character, this country provided a welcoming haven to those who had been victimised by history. [16]

Spontaneously, you opened up your arms to our people, you welcomed them and made it possible for them to start a new life in a new world. It was a gesture we shall never forget. [1]

In May this year [1985], Mr Prime Minister [Brian Mulroney], you addressed members of another, much longer established, immigrant community in Edmonton: namely the Ukrainians. One of their motivations for settling in Canada, you observed, "was the pursuit of freedom -- freedom of thought, freedom of religion, freedom to own property, and freedom from arbitrary government." [27]

*It is not only freedom that Canada offers her new citizens. When immigrants arrive they are bound to be struck by this nation comprising a mosaic of different communities, often of widely differing ethnic origin. [27] And while Canada may not be unique in welcoming the victimised to her shores, **where she stands very nearly alone, is in her encouragement to her new citizens to maintain their traditions and customs.** An encouragement that is, in my view, a particularly wise and mature expression of democratic freedom. [30] (Emphasis added)*

With industry, intelligence, education and self-help, but above all, with all the reassurances that a just, pluralist society bestows, [the Ugandan refugees] were able rapidly to rebuild their lives and institutions, and are discharging their responsibilities

as citizens of this great land and to the less privileged elsewhere. [19] In this sense at least, Canada's generosity is beginning to be repaid, and it will be, by my community's and my permanent effort to see that this generosity is repaid and more than repaid. [1]

[O]n behalf of the Ismaili community and myself as their Imam, our lasting gratitude to the Government and people of Canada. [19] I say, "Thank you Canada." Thank you for having welcomed so many Ismailis, helped them to rebuild their lives and institutions and to believe and trust in their future. But let me also say that there is [today, in 1992,] a new President and Government in Uganda, and I pay tribute to them for their efforts to rebuild their country, and to do justice to those who were so victimised by a previous regime. [2]

On the opportunity for Canada to forge a leadership role in international affairs

Over the years, when the Aga Khan has been asked if Canada has a role in international affairs, he has emphatically said yes. In his 2008 *Vancouver Sun* interview, he was asked: "What's the role of a functioning democracy like ours in terms of facilitating, fostering [stable democracy in developing countries]? What can we do beyond cross our fingers?" He replied:

Oh, I think you can do an enormous amount. I think you can do an enormous amount because first of all I think that you have, as far as I can tell, made a wise divide between the economics of the country and the politics of the country.... So I think there is a respect for the notion that economic management today is a science, it's not a political football. It's a science and it must be run as a science and not run as a political football. That's the first thing. [13]

I think the second thing is that you have succeeded in creating a democratic context in which various groups feel comfortable. You have created a genuine pluralist society. And you have looked for leadership in all your groups. That leadership, which is very diverse in Canada, gives all these communities a sense of comfort that when they have a man or a woman of exceptional talent, the background is not going to come into cause. What's going to come into cause is the performance of the individual for society. That's very important. If you look at African states or Asian states, you can see there are communities that have been totally marginalised whether they have competent individuals or not. So I think that's a second issue which is very important.... [13]

[Y]ou have made meritocracy work across all the communities in Canada. I've observed that, I've watched it, I've admired it, and I say to myself, how has Canada succeeded in doing it? You have to tell me the answer. What I can tell you is that would be a primary objective for me in the developing world. [15]

So there's an awful lot to learn from Canada. And, I've said to my friends here, sometimes you're just too humble.... It's not how Canada sees its work abroad, it's how people abroad see Canada that is the really critical issue. And I think sometimes all of us working in this part of the world have a sense of understanding of what Canadian identity means to these countries. It's a very powerful and very singular identity, a very respected identity. [13]

When asked if Canada still had the same relevance in international affairs it had a decade earlier, the Aga Khan asserted it had *more*:

I would say more than ever before. And the reason is that you are still today, in my view, the case study of a pluralist society. And if you look around the world, at least the world I work in, you can see how these stresses and strains are causing havoc today as they caused havoc ten years ago. Look at what's happening in Kyrgyzstan, look at what happened in Kenya, you see these issues coming out all the time, all the time. They're not going away. And I think that Canada still has a very, very important role in trying to, in a sense, show that this is always going to be a work in progress. There's not a definitive solution. It's always going to be a work in progress. But the methodologies that have been used in Canada to achieve the outcome I think are very, very important indeed. And I'm not seeing that happening in very many countries today. I'm seeing on the contrary the division of communities: linguistic, religious, ethnic, tribal. And so in that sense, Canada remains a very important example.... [15]

Another critical area where Canada "*definitely*" [15] should take an active role is in constitutional issues and governance:

I think there's a recognition that constitutional issues in many countries need to be addressed. How that is addressed is very, very complex. Look at what's happening in Kenya. You have a constitutional process, the constitution was printed, and somebody, between the approval of the constitution and the printing of the document introduced two words which changed the whole nature of the constitution. These are examples. So I think this whole domain of constitutional government is massively important. [15]

Similarly, the Aga Khan singles out Canada for both its mature understanding of and highly developed, successful civil society, explaining the relevance and relationship between civil society and democratic governance:

[As delegates to the Governor General's 2004 Canadian Leadership Conference] you have been jointly exploring a critical aspect of the role of leadership: How the leadership -- political and civil -- can help sustain the moral and dynamic coherence in public life that Canada has so successfully constructed, predicated on the ethic of respect for human dignity. This coherence recognises and builds on difference, enables a

spirit of compromise and consensus in public and legislative policies, and marks out a healthy space for the role of civil society as a sound -- indeed an essential -- bulwark for democratic processes. [10]

Canada has an experience of governance of which much of the world stands in dire need. It is a world of increasing dissension and conflict in which a significant contribution is the failure of different ethnic, tribal, religious, or social groups to search for, and agree upon, a common space for harmonious co-existence.... The new issue that demands the attention of the international community is the need to create stable states with self-sustainable economies and stable, inclusive forms of governance. [10]

[O]f the global threats that face us today, apart from nuclear war or HIV/AIDS, the most preoccupying is not failed states. It is the failure of democracy.... A startling fact today is that nearly forty percent of UN member nations are failed democracies.... It is essential that the question be asked, in every national situation and within each society, "if democracy is failing, why is this the case?" Every effort needs to be made to help correct the situation, rather than referring dismissively to failed states. To my knowledge, democracy can fail anywhere, at any time, in any society ... [10]

Three concepts seem to me to be essential in creating, stabilising and strengthening democracy around the world ... These concepts are meritocracy, pluralism and civil society. In particular, I will ask, what role can Canada play, drawing upon her national genius, in creating or enhancing these great underpinnings of democracy in the developing world? [10]

A recent UN audit of democracy covering 18 Latin American countries re-emphasises the virtues of democracy in advancing human development ... When it turns toward solutions, the report recognises a crucial fact ... "An important relationship exists between citizenship and organisations of civil society, which are major actors in the strengthening of democracy, in the oversight of government stewardship and in the development of pluralism." [10]

Our long presence on the ground gives us an insight that confirms the UN's detailed assessment in Latin America, which is that a democracy cannot function reasonably without two preconditions:

The first is a healthy, civil society. It is an essential bulwark that provides citizens with multiple channels through which to exercise effectively both their rights and duties of citizenship. Even at a very basic level, only a strong civil society can assure isolated rural populations, and the marginalised urban poor of a reasonable prospect of humane treatment, personal security, equity, the absence of discrimination, and access to opportunity. [10]

The second precondition is pluralism. Pluralism means peoples of diverse backgrounds and interests, coming together in organisations of varying types and goals, for different kinds and forms of creative expression, which are valuable and deserving of support by government and society as a whole. [10]

What is civil society? Why is it so essential to the good health of any modern state? [25]

By its very nature, civil society is pluralist because it seeks to speak for the multiple interests not represented by the state. I refer, for example, to organisations which ensure best practices such as legal societies and associations of accountants, doctors and engineers. The meritocracy they represent is the very foundation of pluralism. And meritocracy is one of the principles of democracy itself. [5]

The World Bank uses the term [civil society] to refer to a wide array of organisations that have a presence in public life but are not affiliated to the state. They function on a not-for-profit basis to express the interests and values of their members and others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. In this sense, civil society organisations are multifarious: from community and indigenous groups through faith-based and charitable organisations, to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), labour unions, professional associations and foundations. [25]

But there is a broader definition that holds that civil society embraces an even wider diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms that vary in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. [These include] such organisations as village and women's groups, neighbourhood self-help groups, social movements, business associations, micro-credit organisations, coalitions and advocacy groups....The positive action of these civil society initiatives is especially critical where governments are weak or non-performing, as in situations of failed democracies or post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction. [25]

Whatever definition is used, a quality civil society is independent of government, pluralist and led by merit-based educated leadership. Not only does Canadian civil society eminently meet these three criteria of being non-governmental pluralist and merit-led, I know of no country where civil society is more empathetic with the needs of civil society of the countries of Africa and Asia in which I have been working for some 45 years. I have, therefore, asked myself, not once, but hundreds of times, if and how Canadian civil society can mobilise its resources more vigorously to help improve the quality of life of the peoples of Africa and Asia. [25]

Asked in these terms, the issue is that of sharing the many forms of human knowledge and experience that create and then sustain a civil society of quality, rather than the

massive injection of monetary resources. [25] In both [its] aid programmes and [its] peacekeeping efforts, [Canada has] been concerned to invest in people, rather than in prestige projects and programmes. [27]

Partnerships between the developed and developing worlds can and do work. Moreover, they demonstrate how essential universities and their lifeblood -- ... their graduates -- are to civil society. [25]

On the opportunity for Canada's intelligentsia

When the Aga Khan has had the opportunity to address graduates of various Canadian academic institutions, he has urged them to engage themselves internationally in the tradition of their predecessors, who made Canada one of the most respected countries in the world.

Today, you are graduating from [the University of Toronto,] one of Canada's greatest universities ... I am speaking to you as a person whose roots and institutional engagement are in the developing world; as a Muslim; as someone seeking to engage with, and improve, the lives of the millions of people who live in Asia and Africa. [25]

It is against this background that I invite you -- indeed, I urge you -- to reflect deeply on the needs of our world today. I am sure you will wish to seize the opportunities for sharing your knowledge with future generations here in Canada, but should you wish it, the reach of your knowledge can go far beyond your shores, and will be deeply welcomed. Because civil society is so critical to the quality of life, and the pace of progress, and because it finds expression in so many pluralist forms and spaces, I am convinced that the future before you, in this global environment we share, offers you a remarkable spectrum of opportunities. [25]

Speaking to University of Alberta graduates in 2009, the Aga Khan said:

The University's commitment to the global context and the developing world has been inspiring, and the match between your areas of expertise and developing world requirements, as I understand them, has been nothing short of extraordinary. For many years, your leaders have set priorities which intersect with vital development needs ... Roderick Fraser, your President Emeritus and a Trustee of the Aga Khan University, is one of the many Canadian visionaries who have helped forge this remarkable record. [24]

I was pleased to read recently the University's own description of its continuing international goals: increasing joint programmes, encouraging semesters abroad and broadening exchange programmes, building international community service and internship opportunities, and creating new academic programmes with a global

perspective. What an impressive agenda! It represents precisely the sort of outreach from Western intellectual centres which I believe is essential for global progress. [24]

The international impact of this University's work is reinforced by the high regard in which Canada itself is held as a valued development partner. Canada comes to that challenge with impressive credentials; no history as a colonial power, a successful pluralist society, high standards of living, and a readiness to welcome a global leadership role. In today's community of nations, a country's standing is no longer recognised simply by what it can achieve for itself, but just as much by what it can do for others. In this context, Canada has become a world "power" in the best sense of that word. As young people with a Canadian education, you will be warmly welcomed by the global community if you should choose to spend some time in international activity, making the world your workplace. The path has been well prepared by eminent Canadians who have gone before you. [24]

Canada is regarded very highly by the developing world. She is welcomed diplomatically everywhere in the world and her influence extends far beyond her natural size and wealth. The foreign aid administered by the Canadian International Development Agency [CIDA] illustrates very well what I mean. [22] [T]he Canadian International Development Agency [is], in my view, leader in its field. It is a pleasure to collaborate with it ... [28] Canada is not among the largest international donors, but her programs are extremely well administered and reach the ordinary people whom they are intended to benefit. That is a rare accomplishment today. [22]

On past collaboration and partnerships with Canada

The Aga Khan Development Network has partnered with Canadian institutions for decades. This alliance has now been formally extended to include the Government of Canada itself:

Friday last [1992], I signed an important accord in Ottawa for co-operation with the Canadian Government on behalf of the Aga Khan Development network. It is a further -- very significant -- step in the close and increasingly productive collaboration between the network and Canadian institutions and more particularly the Aga Khan Foundation and CIDA [Canadian International Development Agency]. Indeed this accord follows on similar accords signed with the Governments of the United Kingdom, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. [2]

The AKDN Foundation is an umbrella organisation which coordinates the activities of over 200 agencies and institutions that make up the network, employing a total of 70,000 paid staff and 100,000 volunteers [2009 figures]. The network operates in 35 of the poorest countries in the world and is statutorily secular. [23]

Successful experience with democracy, civil society and pluralism are the national genius of Canada of which much of the developing world is in dire need. As an example - and there are many -- of how these Canadian assets can help transform living conditions, I often cite our experience in Northern Pakistan, a case study situation of poor development prospects in a harsh, sparsely endowed physical environment, further beset by ethnic and religious hostilities. The AKDN has been present there for over twenty years, with CIDA as a lead partner. Our joint micro experiment with grassroots democracy, civil society and pluralism has been the spring board for a dramatic trebling of per capita incomes, with corresponding improvements in social services and cultural awareness in what was once one of the poorest areas on earth. Tensions occasionally resurface, incited by mischief; but by and large, where once there was conflict born of despair and past memories, there is now a spirit of consensus built around hope in the future. [19]

I have to tell you the capacity of rural support programs to impact people's lives in these high mountain environments in Asia is fantastic. ... [And now we are moving] that into the University of Central Asia so that it becomes part of an academic process that will cover 22 million people ... who live in the high mountain areas of central Asia. [17] (Emphasis added)

[The University of Central Asia is a partnership between] Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and ourselves, plus the right to any other country to join us, but it's a university that's come into existence through an international treaty process, and the reason for that, that I needed a political guarantee that this would be a self-governing university.... [I think it is remarkable] that a program put together nearly 17 years ago, with Canadian help, is now moving into a structured presence which can impact so many people because clearly the University of Central Asia is going to be teaching partially from the knowledge-bases it's gained from (inaudible [CIDA in Northern Pakistan?]). That ... is an area of very, very great success, I think. Fascinating to me. [17]

[A second success story we have had with CIDA] is the Aga Khan University, where we started with a school of nursing, with McMaster, we went to higher education for women. This school of nursing is now carrying out work in East Africa, it's been at work helping Afghanistan.... [T]hese are joint programs where we are benefiting from Canadian ... And we're able to take this Canadian knowledge, build on it, create institutional capacity, and then get the institutional capacity moved to other parts of the world. [17]

***[T]hese are two of the programs ... which I value very, very, very highly. Very highly.** [17] (Emphasis added)*

Canada is this year [1992] celebrating the anniversary of its 125th year of confederation. Few confederations can, have contributed so much to so many peoples in just over a century. I have no doubt that many of these peoples -- including the Ismailis - - will be looking to the next century as a time in which to carry Canadian ideals world-wide, and for no other reason than that they believe in them. [2]

On future collaboration and partnerships with Canada

With the establishment of several new unique and globally-influential institutions like the Global Centre for Pluralism, the Delegation for the Ismaili Imamat, and the Aga Khan Museum, the Aga Khan hopes for even wider, deeper, and stronger partnerships with Canada's private and public sector:

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. When we have talked of development in this context over the years, we have always found responsive interlocutors in Canada.... In the course of this work we have seen at first hand Canadian global leadership at its best -- thoughtful, empathetic and avoiding both intellectual pretensions and dogmatic simplifications. [16] This successful collaboration, moreover, is deeply rooted in a remarkable convergence of values -- our strong mutual dedication to the concept and practise of pluralism. [12]

The establishment of the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat represents yet another step on a long path. It will give us another platform for strengthening and extending our relationship. [16] [It is demonstrative] of the Ismaili community's permanent presence in, and commitment to Canada. [19]

The Delegation will serve a representational role for the Imamat and its non-denominational, philanthropic and development agencies which constitute the Aga Khan Development Network -- the AKDN. [16] The building will be a metaphor for humanism and enlightenment and for the humility that comes from the constant search for answers that leads inevitably to more questions. [19]

An open, secular facility, the Delegation will be a sanctuary for peaceful, quiet diplomacy, informed by the Imamat's outlook of global convergence and the development of civil society. It will be an enabling venue for fruitful public engagements, information services and educational programmes, all backed up by high quality research, to sustain a vibrant intellectual centre, and a key policy-informing institution. [19] 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. [16] It will be a window for the AKDN to reinforce

existing, and cultivate new, partnerships with national and international agencies present in Ottawa, that share the ethic of contributing to an improved quality of life in the developing world. [19]

This concern to improve the human condition underlines the long-standing relationship of the Ismaili Imam and the AKDN with Canada's Government and civil society institutions in many parts of Africa and Asia. [19] To be able to site this building on Confederation Boulevard, in close proximity to your major national institutions as well as representations from abroad, is itself a symbol of the outgoing, interactive spirit which must guide our response to global challenges. [16]

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. [16]

Our hope and expectation is that the Global Centre for Pluralism will become a vital force in our world for research, learning and dialogue, engaging Canadians from all walks of life, and joining hands with a widening array of partners. I am grateful that the Government of Canada has contributed so generously to its material and intellectual resources. Making available the Old War Museum is a particularly generous and symbolic gesture. Let us replace war with peace. Our own commitment is to invest in this building so that it becomes a worthy testament to Canada's global leadership in the cause of pluralism. [12]

Those who talk about an inevitable "clash of civilisations" can point today to an accumulating array of symptoms which sometimes seems to reflect their diagnosis. I believe, however, that this diagnosis is wrong -- that its symptoms are more dramatic than they are representative -- and that these symptoms are rooted in human ignorance rather than human character. [12]

As Canadians know so well, the ideal of pluralism is not new in this world. [It has] honourable and ancient foundations, including deep roots in Islamic tradition. [19] The Islamic world is very, very pluralist and, to me, what is important is that the industrialised world should understand that pluralism. [13] [There is a] tendency to generalise Islam [but] there are many different interpretations of Islam. As a Muslim, if I said to you that I didn't recognise the difference between a Greek Orthodox, or Russian Orthodox, or Protestant or a Catholic, I think you'd say to me you don't understand the Christian world. So let me reverse that question.... But [the ignorance of Islam is] a long-established problem and it's going to take, I think, several decades before we reach a situation where the definition of an educated person includes a basic understanding of the Islamic world. And that hasn't been the case. And the absence of that basic education

has caused all sorts of misunderstandings ... [3] No wonder that the bogey of Islam as a monolith, irreconcilable to the values of the West or, worse, as a seedbed of violence, lurks behind its depiction as being both opposed to, and incapable of, pluralism. This image flies directly in the face of the respect that Islam's cherished scripture confers upon believers in monotheistic traditions, calling upon Muslims to engage with them in the finest manner, and with wisdom. [10]

[But] the problem of ignorance is a problem that can be addressed. Perhaps it can even be ameliorated -- but only if we go to work on our educational tasks with sustained energy, creativity and intelligence. That is why we felt the Global Centre for Pluralism was needed. That is why the Global Centre for Pluralism exists today. And that is why the Global Centre for Pluralism holds such enormous promise for all of our tomorrows. [12]

*The Delegation of the Ismaili Imam in the federal capital, the new Aga Khan Museum and the Ismaili Centre to be built in Toronto, are **symbols of [the] seriousness and respect that Canada, leading the West generally, accords to the world of Islam,** of which the Ismaili Community, though a diverse minority itself, is fully representative. [19] (Emphasis added)*

In situating [the Aga Khan Museum and Global Centre for Pluralism] in Canada, we acknowledge both a tradition of tolerance and inclusiveness as well as an environment that has permitted diversity to flourish, enriching civic life of each individual and community that has sought to make this country its home. It is to this commitment to pluralism that we will turn in seeking to make these institutions both a repository of heritage and a source of inspiration for societies the world over in the future. [29]

[T]he Museum's focus on the arts of Islam will make it a unique institution in North America, contributing to a better understanding of Islamic civilisations -- and especially of the plurality within Islam and of Islam's relationship to other traditions. [31] 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. [32]

May this mutual understanding, so important to the future stability and progress of our world, flourish many fold. It is my sincere hope that, by its presence and the functions it fulfils, the Delegation of the Ismaili Imam will be an illuminating landmark on "the Mile of History". An epitome of friendship to one and all, it will radiate Islam's precepts of one humanity, the dignity of man, and the nobility of joint striving in deeds of goodness. [19]

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