In the past, much of the dynamism of Muslim society was born from the leaders of the faith: the Imams, the Pir and Mullahs. This identity between the leaders of the faith and the empire’s intellectual elite was a continuous source of strength both to the faith and those whose duty it was to govern the empire. In future I believe it will be in our society’s interest to have a much wider platform in common between our religious and our secular leaders. Our religious leadership must be acutely aware of secular trends. Equally, our academic or secular elite must be deeply aware of Muslim history, of the scale and depth of leadership exercised by the Islamic empire of the past in all fields. It is through the creation of such a new elite ... that there must come about a revival in Muslim thought.

[As the graduates of the Aga Khan Academies] grow into leadership positions in their own societies ... it is my hope that it will be these new generations of our intelligentsia, who, driven by their own knowledge and their own inspiration, will change their own societies and will gradually replace many of the external forces who today appear, and indeed sometimes seek, to control our destinies. These young men and women will become leaders in the institutions of civil society in their own countries, in international organisations, and in all those institutions, academic, economic and others, which cause positive change in our world.

As the pace of history has accelerated, agility 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. Openness and flexibility have become prerequisites for progress, and success has gone more and more to those who can connect and respond. Specialised expertise, pragmatic temperament, mental resourcefulness - these are increasingly the keys to effective leadership - along with a capacity for intellectual humility which keeps one’s mind constantly open to a variety of viewpoints and welcomes pluralistic exchange. The key to future progress in the developing world will be its ability to identify, to develop, and to retain expert and effective home-grown leadership.

Educating effective future leaders is a high responsibility. We must rise above the antiquated approaches of earlier days and instead infuse our students with what I would call three “A’s” of modern learning - the spirit of anticipation, the spirit of adaptation and the spirit of adventure.