The variety of the world is not only more available, it is nearly inescapable. Human difference is more proximate - and more intense. What was once beyond our view is now at our side - and, indeed, to use the popular expression, "in our face." … The challenge of diversity is now a global challenge - and how we address it will have global consequences. [2]

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. [1]

Pluralist societies are not accidents of history. They are a product of enlightened education and continuous investment by governments and all of civil society in recognizing and celebrating the diversity of the world’s peoples. [4]

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. [3]

Whether it be in Central Europe, the Great Lakes region in Africa, or in Afghanistan - to cite just one example from three different continents - one of the common denominators has been the attempt by communal groups, be they ethnic, religious, or tribal groups, to impose themselves on others. All such attempts are based on the principle of eradicating the cultural basis that provides group identity. Without cultural identity, social cohesion gradually dissolves and human groups lose their necessary point of reference to relate with each other, and with other groups. [1]

[1] Prince Claus Fund Conference on Culture and Development, Concluding Address (Amsterdam, The Netherlands) 7 September 2002
[4] Keynote Address to the Annual Conference of German Ambassadors (Berlin, Germany) 6 September 2004
In the past, much of the dynamism of Muslim society was born from the leaders of the faith: the Imams, the Pirs 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. [2]

[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. [1]

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. [3]

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. [4]

[1] Institute of Ismaili Studies 25th Anniversary Graduation Ceremony (London, United Kingdom) 19 October 2003
[2] University of Sind Convocation Address (Hyderabad, Pakistan) 6 February 1970
The results of the questionnaire showed conclusively that the average reader in Kenya wanted a more serious newspaper than his counterpart in Europe or America. He wanted, in other words, to be informed and educated and not just to be entertained. The public, at least in many Third World societies, is not as voyeuristic as some may assume. It is, however, immediately sensitive to sectarian views or news and the converse seems to hold true overall for Western societies.

For centuries, the press has cast itself as the champion of understanding and enlightenment. And yet, even as the press has become more international, it has often left a trail of misunderstanding in its wake. But if the media have sometimes been part of the problem ... then the media can also be part of the solution. The same media which serves to distort or discredit old cultures, can also be used to re-validate them, and to help explain them to others.

Good journalism requires the best we can muster in terms of disciplined learning, intelligent analysis, prudent judgement, and nuanced expression. Most particularly, it requires people who can write clear and compelling prose.

[Another media challenge] is the need to balance concerns about press freedom with a greater emphasis on press responsibility. In my view, we are sometimes too preoccupied with the rights of the press as an independent social critic - and we pay too little attention to the obligations of the press as an influential social leader. The problem comes, of course, when Freedom of the Press is used to shield the press - not just from government interference, but from any sense of social accountability.

Invariably, what the pursuit of short-term media profit means is the near-term pursuit of the largest possible audience - the highest ratings, the best demographics, the most impressive circulation and advertising numbers. Inevitably, it seems designing products with instant mass or sectarian appeal - focusing on what is divisive or dramatic or diverting or sensational - at the expense of what is in the interests of society or truly significant.

[The] media increasingly tell audiences what they want to hear rather than what they ought to hear. And what too many people want is not to be informed, but to be entertained.
In whatever we do, at whatever level, we have always been reliant upon volunteers. I would like to leave you with a final thought. It is that, especially in today’s difficult circumstances, we must never lose sight of nor undervalue the secret of our Aga Khan Network’s success, the element which underpins its professionalism. The heart and lifeblood of our network are the voluntary workers; the Boards, the Committees, the volunteers young and old who contribute their time and efforts. [1]

I submit that one of our great goals, if we are to create an Enabling Environment of hope and determination, is to give our volunteers opportunities to become more expert and professional - more rational and skilled, without killing their passion. At the same time, our leaders of government and business must arouse in their professionals, the will and conviction of the volunteer. [2]

The voluntary ethos has been extraordinarily important among the people of Africa. Perhaps ninety per cent of African housing is the result of family and community efforts. In Kenya education, the Harambee movement has been extremely significant and there is an equivalent in Botswana. In health, it is now widely recognised that the future lies in community-based systems. [2]

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.... Sharing time and knowledge is saying that I will make available the knowledge that I have to those people who, otherwise, would not have access to it ... in such a form that this knowledge could be employed in building capacities for the future ... [4]

[It is] my conviction that the indigenous voluntary sector must be encouraged to enlarge its role in the development process. These agencies have the potential to draw hundreds of millions of people into direct participation in development. They can be cost-effective and innovative. [3]

[Giving can take many forms - funds, time, ideas, and professional skills. Everyone can and should be a donor, not just the wealthy, and all forms of giving should be encouraged and recognised. Volunteerism is critical, and is obtaining greater and greater recognition and encouragement. [5]

[4] Paroquias de Portugal Interview, António Marujo and Faranaz Keshavjee, ‘The West should accept that Islam does not separate the world and faith’ (Lisbon, Portugal) 23 July 2008
The attempt to normatise [the interpretation of the Qur’an] has a very little chance to succeed and it would be unethical to the essence of Islam. There is a very famous ayat in the Qur’an that says: "To yourself, your faith. To myself, my faith." [4]

Reports on the built environment of Islam today are disheartening reading. They tell us that the wonderful distinctiveness of Islamic architecture is disappearing, that much of it today looks like Frankfurt, Bogota or Dallas. There is such homogenised blandness that one is left with few visual clues to know where one is or who the people of this place might be. [1]

It has been said that the most important fact about modern communication technology is that it "universalises the particular and particularises the universal" which simply suggests that local and global experiences are increasingly intermixed. Such an inter-mixture 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 cooperation. [5]

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. [3]

In the final analysis, 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. 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 ... [6]

Those groups that seek to standardise, homogenise, or if you will allow me, to normatise ... those around them must be actively resisted through countervailing activities. [2]

The attempt to normatise [the interpretation of the Qur’an] has a very little chance to succeed and it would be unethical to the essence of Islam. There is a very famous ayat in the Qur’an that says: "To yourself, your faith. To myself, my faith." [4]
[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. [3]

The [AKDN] recognises the critical need for long-term growth and employment: we believe it is best met by private individuals investing their own resources in these endeavours. The genius of the Third World is in its peoples.... In their diversity, vitality, creativity and resilience, they represent the hope for the future and the greatest of the many resources available. [2]

But I would end, as I began, by suggesting that an Enabling Environment can only do so much. In the final analysis, it can create a framework in which individuals can make the best possible use of their own personal gifts. An Ayat in the Holy Qur’an says: "Verily, God does not change a people’s condition unless they change that which is in themselves." In the end, it is the will and the resourcefulness of the individual human being that, with Allah’s blessings and guidance, will determine our future.... [I]t is to that end that each of us must continually be re-dedicated. [4]
[The Aga Khan Award for Architecture] can help to cause the changes in rural and physical environments to be appropriate to those environments. As an example, a large part of the Islamic world is located in a seismic belt ...Yet, seismic construction in rural environments is unheard of. People who build for themselves do not know about seismically-sound construction. Most of the construction in rural environments is self-built, it is not architect-built. The question is, how do you get that knowledge into the rural environment? How do you teach people how to build in a safe manner? [1] *

I am also concerned there is still too little attention being paid to design for communities to protect residents from the effects of earthquakes, many of them in remote rural areas. Two million people died as a result of earthquakes in the last century and 100 million were severely affected. There are vast populations that live in seismic-sensitive high-mountain areas where we must focus attention. [3]

Everything that characterises high mountains and the people residing in them exists in its most extreme form. The physical bulk of these mountains is enormous, ... climatic variation is extreme, and natural hazards - earthquakes, avalanches, rock-slides, and mudslides - are frequent, endangering human lives ... as well as houses, schools, hospitals, and all of the built environment. The lives of the impoverished are, by definition, precarious, a precariousness that is even worse in high mountain regions. [4]

In the developing countries the vast majority of rural homes constructed in the foreseeable future will be self-built, as is the case now.... One way to improve the village housing situation [is] to provide the basic services and technical advice for village housing schemes, the labour and much of the materials being supplied by the people themselves. The "site and service" idea is not new, although perhaps in the rural context it would be more appropriate to refer to "technology and service" .... The concept is rightly attracting attention today, because, when re-thought in a modern context, it can provide a low cost solution to rural housing needs.... Obviously no kind of "technology and service" or co-operative scheme can be carried out economically on a single unit basis [but rather] in accordance with an overall plan drawn up by technical advisers, who might offer a small number of basic house designs and give instruction to the villagers in the elements of structure, sanitation, ventilation, and the more effective use of local materials. [2] *

[1] Architectural Record Interview, Robert Ivy (New York, USA) 19 February 2002
[2] Association of Builders and Developers Seminar on 'Shelter for the Homeless' (Karachi, Pakistan) 16 March 1983

* Auroville Earth Institute (presently the representative for Asia of the UNESCO Chair “Earthen Architecture, Constructive Cultures and Sustainable Development”) is a non-profit research organisation which has developed low-cost technology for self-built seismic resistant homes and community buildings. For more information visit: http://www.earth-auroville.com/
The concept of "The Enabling Environment" 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. In the end, human progress must grow out of human inspiration and endeavour. A sound enabling environment must create a favourable framework in which people’s energy and creativity can be motivated, mobilised and rewarded. This framework should embrace such conditions as political stability, safety and security, citizen rights and predictable democratic practices. A supportive environment should include transport systems which make cooperation possible, incentives which encourage broader trade, and a legal and administrative framework which is impartial, predictable, and efficient. [1]

Both the development of the economy and the success of social institutions depend on the creation of the right environment for progress, an environment which enables both businesses and people to realise their full potential. This Enabling Environment is created by various things.

Confidence in the future. Reliance on the rule of law and a system of laws which itself encourages enterprise and initiative. Democratic institutions. Protection of the rights of citizens. These are what encourage investment, encourage good managers to remain, encourage doctors and nurses and teachers to want to serve their country, rather than to emigrate as soon as they are skilled. The creation and extension to all areas of the nation’s life of this Enabling Environment is the single most important factor in Third World development. It is as critical to national growth as sunlight is to the growth of plants. Such an environment has been provided in the newly industrialised countries of South East Asia and in barely a generation those countries have successfully leapt across the development gap. [2]

Development is ultimately about people about enabling them to participate fully in the process and to make informed choices and decisions on their futures. I believe this requires a creative and supportive partnership between government, private enterprise, and the voluntary sector … Government should provide the rules of the game for the Enabling Environment – the legislative and policy framework. It should also invest in people and infrastructure to the extent that resources permit. The business sector is the principal engine of growth to create those resources…. [G]ood governance is likely to be achieved only by organisations nurtured by an Enabling Environment, where the laws of the state encourage private enterprise, diversity of initiatives, and voluntary not-for-profit organisations. [3]

---

In future, even beyond the Muslim world, I believe it will be the abuse of freedom that fuels debate. Indeed, in many areas people defend the principle of freedom to a point where freedom tends to become depravity, permissiveness and disrespect. At that point, Islam says "no." [2]

I am suggesting that freedom of expression is an incomplete value unless it is used honourably, and that the obligations of citizenship in any society should include a commitment to informed and responsible expression. [7] Frankly, this so-called freedom of the press has reached a state of such licence that virtually anything can be printed. [6]

Freedom must not be allowed to degenerate into licence, whether in universities or in society as a whole. When it has so degenerated, it has invariably destroyed the very civilisations which gave it birth. [5]

A passion for justice, the quest for equality, a respect for tolerance, a dedication to human dignity ... constitute what classical philosophers - in the East and West alike - have described as human "virtue" - not merely the absence of negative restraints on individual freedom, but also a set of positive responsibilities, moral disciplines which prevent liberty from turning into license. [1]

[1] School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, Commencement Address (Columbia, USA) 15 May 2006
[6] India Today Interview, Aroon Purie (India) February 1989
[8] Vancouver Sun Interview, Don Cayo (Toronto, Canada) 28 November 2008
Economic developments experts say the Aga Khan’s activities offer a useful template for others - including philanthropists like Bill Gates and George Soros ... whose foundation work usually stops short of owning businesses outright in poor countries. Paul Collier, an economist at Oxford University who specialises in the problems of poor countries, says he believes that aid agencies could benefit from operating more like venture capitalists - and more like the Aga Khan. "He gets a multiplier effect from his investments that’s really lacking in foreign aid.... I’m impressed with his way of accepting risk and thinking long term." 

[AKFED’s] focus is not on profit, but on people....We seek ways to transfer knowledge and technical capacity to local citizens and to the national economy to generate an economic ripple effect. 

If you try to put social development ahead of economic support, it doesn’t work. You have to do both together. A community whose economics don’t change is not one that can support community structures, education, healthcare, it doesn’t have the wherewithal.

[AKFED’s] share of profits must be entirely reinvested in the group’s projects. Any return on investment should solely benefit the population of the country where it has been made.

[Private initiative] can create and consolidate an indigenous entrepreneurial class, with the managerial skills and organisational structures .... In other words, it can participate in forging the human capital, which is the bedrock of a nation’s development.

[T]hose who care about African development have been seeking an important key, searching for the best way to improve the quality of human life by advancing the pace of economic development... [The Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development] is ready to take justified investment risks - to a greater extent than many other investors. We are ready to be patient investors, with a far-ranging vision. We are long-term players, maintaining our presence even during periods of economic or political turbulence.... In the end, what will count most for AKFED is what it can contribute to the quality of human life in the cities, provinces, countries and regions in which we function. That will be our most important dividend.

AI's Thirst: An Explanation of Natural Language Processing. How AI systems understand language, communicate, and generate responses. This is the crux of artificial intelligence's core function.
To understand this dimension of the religious office I hold, one must appreciate that Islam encompasses both the spiritual and the secular. This unity underpins an unrelenting effort towards an equitable order, where the vulnerable are helped to regain the dignity of self-fulfilment. [2]

The Qur’an, the Hadith, the sayings of Hazrat Ali, and many scholarly sources make numerous references to the forms and purposes of philanthropy. Human dignity - restoring it, and sustaining it - is a central theme. Enabling individuals to recover and maintain their dignity as befitting their status as Allah’s greatest creation, is one of the main reasons for charitable action. There is dignity in the individual’s ability to manage his or her destiny. That being the case, the best of charity, in Islamic terms, can go beyond material support alone. It can take the form of human or professional support ... or of the sharing of knowledge to help marginalised individuals build different and better futures for themselves. [Thus charity] can be seen as a continuum of support in a time frame which can extend to years. This means that multi-year support for institutions that enable individuals to achieve dignity by becoming self-sustainable, holds a special place amongst the many forms of charity in the eyes of Islam. [1]

[The Aga Khan University’s humane mission is] its imperative to respond to the needs of the common man. The faculty, I believe, in taking our students to the Katchi Abadis, not only instruct them in the techniques of primary health care for the poor, but also expose them to deeper truths - our common humanity and worth, humility before great suffering, and recognition of dignity and wisdom among simple people. [4]

[Housing is the most difficult area of social development to appraise in terms of human, as opposed to architectural, results. It is far easier to quantify the effects of providing better education or health care facilities against their costs. How do you measure the benefits of a family having a decent home, of the father’s dignity, of the mother’s pride, or the children’s sense of security, of better family and better work potential? [3]

We firmly believe that the disadvantaged amongst us must be able to build a sound and secure future with dignity and pride - and not merely to survive. Empowering underprivileged populations to change their futures has always been a cornerstone of the Aga Khan Development Network’s endeavour, here in Pakistan and elsewhere. [5]
Our historic adherence is to the Jafari Madhhab and other Madhahib of close affinity, and it continues, under the leadership of the hereditary Ismaili Imam of the time. This adherence is in harmony also with our acceptance of Sufi principles of personal search and balance between the zahir and the spirit or the intellect which the zahir signifies.... In keeping with our historic tradition of ever abiding commitment to Muslim unity, we reaffirm our respect for the historical interpretation of Islam by our brother Muslims as an equally earnest endeavour to practise the faith in Allah and emulate the example of our Holy Prophet, may peace be upon him, which illuminates Muslim lives and which, In'sha'Allah, will elevate all Muslim souls. [1]

The Imam must direct Ismailis on the practice of their religion and constantly interpret the Qur'an for them according to our theology. On the spiritual plane, the Imam’s authority is absolute. Ismailis believe therefore that what the Imam says is the only true interpretation possible. This is fundamental to our religion ... [4]

You don’t change the religion. But you might change certain traditions. For instance, my grandfather made it quite clear to the Ismaili Community that women were not to wear the veil, and they no longer do. I have not made any strong directives of this type. [5]

We hope that the Ismaili Centre, in its activities and programmes ... will succeed in presenting the Ismaili community of Portugal and the world community, as a community and an interpretation of Islam which is intellectually strong and humanistic in outlook. [3]

---

[1] Message to The International Islamic Conference (Amman, Jordan) 4 July 2005
[3] Centro Ismail Lisbon Foundation Stone Ceremony (Lisbon, Portugal) 18 December 1996
The Imam is first of all obviously responsible for the interpretation and practise of the faith and that is a role which my grandfather fulfilled which I fulfil today. Secondly, the Imam’s decisions with regards to matters of faith are binding obviously on members of the community. [5] Insofar as a institution can be democratic, yes [I am a democrat]. There are areas where in the interpretation of faith, democracy cannot, cannot play. But in the choice of leadership, in consultation on decisions, I do seek to consult as widely as possible. [6]

In the Muslim ethical tradition, which links spirit and matter, the Imam not only leads in the interpretation of the faith, but also in the effort to improve the quality of life of his community, and of the wider societies within which it lives; for a guiding principle of the Imamat’s institutions is to replace walls which divide with bridges that unite. [1] To the Imamat, the meaning of "quality of life" extends to the entire ethical and social context in which people live, and not only to their material well-being measured over generation after generation. [3]

When you inherit an office, which is a life office, you are simply a link in the chain. [Y]ou therefore look at life somewhat differently ... In my case, my concern is ... I would like the next Imam to have a structure and a system which enables him to be effective in the ethical and the human terminology of this institution.... Now some things are impossible to achieve [and] I simply have to try and move the issues forward as much as I can. The next Imam will then decide how he wishes to handle the issues. But, it is the continuum which is at the back of my mind ... And that's why perhaps my time dimension appears different ... If I have to wait 12, 15, 20 years to achieve goals which I think are important, I will wait 12, 15, or 20 years. [4]

The Protocol of Co-operation between the Government of the Portuguese Republic and the Ismaili Imamat, which we signed this evening, is the first such Agreement that the Ismaili Imamat has signed with a Western Government ... For the Ismaili Imamat, the Ismaili Community worldwide and me, this is a highly important day. [2]

[The Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat] will be a symbolic seat for the Imamat’s permanent presence in Canada, and a platform for constructive exchanges that mutually broaden moral and intellectual horizons.... 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. [1]

[1] The Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat Foundation Stone Ceremony (Ottawa, Canada) 6 June 2005
[4] Pranay Gupte Interview (United States, United Kingdom) 1999
I think we are experiencing a time of, in a sense, the search for a legitimacy in interpretation of Islam in relation to the modern world, in relation to modern society, in relation to non-Muslim societies and in that search there are all sorts of interpretations being put forward. I personally am very cautious about seeking a formalistic approach, because I think that one of the great risks... is the fact that it tends to anchor a faith in one time and that is one aspect which, of my faith which I would never accept. I would never accept that the concept of Islam, the practice of Islam, cannot be fulfilled in the modern world or in the world of tomorrow. I think [saying scientific and technological progress is incompatible with the practice of Islam is] one of the most offensive things that can be said about Islam and I take issue with it in every way.

The two main tendencies [of the Ummah], traditional and modern, are trying to maintain, indeed to develop, their Islamic legitimacy. Loss of identity, anxiety about the risk of being caught up in a process of Westernisation that is essentially Christian and is perceived as becoming less and less religious, are deep and very real concerns. In order to contain this risk... we must re-invigorate our own value systems and cultural expressions.

If ignoring the past was a problem on one side, then the opposite danger was an exaggerated submission to the past, so that some creations and creators became prisoners of dogma or nostalgia. 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 Holy Prophet’s life gives us every fundamental guideline that we require to resolve the problem... His example of integrity, loyalty, honesty, generosity both of means and of time, his solicitude for the poor, the weak and the sick, his steadfastness in friendship, his humility in success, his magnanimity in victory, his simplicity, his wisdom in conceiving new solutions for problems which could not be solved by traditional methods, without affecting the fundamental concepts of Islam, surely all these are foundations which, correctly understood and sincerely interpreted, must enable us to conceive what should be a truly modern and dynamic Islamic Society in the years ahead.

References:

[1] All India TV and Radio Interview, Rajiv Mehrotra (India) February 1989
[6] Times of India Interviews ‘Celebrating Beauty’ & ‘Education has not kept pace with globalisation’ (New Delhi, India) 27 November 2004
Concepts such as meritocracy, free-world economics, or multi-party democracy, honed and tested in the West may generally have proven their worth. But valid though they may be, responsible leadership in the Islamic world must ask if they can be adapted to their cultures which may not have the traditions or infra-structure to assimilate them. There is a real risk that political pluralism could harden latent ethnic or religious divisions into existing or new political structures. There is a real risk that market place economics could lead to ruthless competition, and increased concentration of wealth, further marginalising the existing poor. There is a real risk that meritocracy could exacerbate, for example, the existing problem of equitable access to quality education and sophisticated health care. Although the modern page of human history was written in the West, you should not expect or desire for that page to be photocopied by the Muslim world. [1]

Democracy should be society’s way of protecting the rights and entitlements of all its members. Entitlement, for the weakest or neediest, to their basic rights. But also, entitlement for the most capable ... A world in which the individual merit of men and women can exist, flourish, and grow. For merit is not an anti-democratic concept. On the contrary, I believe that creating opportunities for individual excellence is the very essence of democracy: its reason to be. [2]

In the final analysis, no nation, no race, no individual has a monopoly of intelligence or virtue. If we are to pursue the ideal of meritocracy in human endeavour, then its most perfect form will grow out of a respect for human pluralism, so that we can harness the very best contributions from whomever and wherever they may come. [5]

For much of human history, leaders have been born into their roles, or have fought their way in - or have bought their way in. But in this new century - a time of unusual danger and stirring promise, it is imperative that aristocracies of class give way to aristocracies of talent, ... to meritocracies. Is it not a fundamental concept of democracy itself, that leadership should be chosen on the basis of merit? [3]

If I may leave you with one thought this evening, I would like it to be that the limited sources of the Third World can only be made the most of by good management and the encouragement of merit, at all levels and in all walks of life. [4]
For many centuries, enlightened people have argued that democracy was the key to social progress. But today, that contention is in dispute.... The sad fact ... is that nearly 40% of UN member nations are now categorised not merely as failed states - but as "failed democracies." [4] Too often, democracy is understood to be only about elections - momentary majorities. But effective governance is much more than that. What happens before and after elections? ... How is decision-making shared - so that leaders of different backgrounds can interactively govern - rather than small cliques who rule autocratically? [1]

Often, the more democratic governments [have been] the more effective and responsible. But this was not consistently true - and I have recently found it to be decreasingly true. [5] Our challenge is not to find alternatives to democracy, but to find more and better ways to make democracy work.... I would like to make ... four suggestions for addressing our democratic disappointments and advancing our democratic hopes. [F]irst, the need for greater flexibility in defining the paths to democracy; secondly, the need for greater diversity in the institutions which participate in democratic life; thirdly, the need to expand the public’s capacity for democracy; and finally, the need to strengthen public integrity - on which democracy rests. [4]

The West must move away from the idea of wanting to transpose its vision of democracy identically into the Islamic world. This cannot work. The West cannot simply erase 1400 years of Muslim history. Islam is by no means a contradiction to democracy, quite the contrary. [6] I see no conflict at all if I go back to the original construct of the Muslim community and how they dealt with the issues of leadership. [7]

The failure of democracy is not specific to the Islamic world.... About 55% of the population in South American states said that they would prefer to live under a paternalistic dictatorship instead of an incompetent or corrupt democracy that is not improving their living condition. [3]

We think that every young educated person has to have a basic understanding of the methodologies of human governance. [Y]ou have a referendum on a constitution, you consult a population that has no knowledge whatsoever about the choices of constitutional government ... and you ask them to vote. Intellectually, what is the credibility of that? [2]
From the seventh to the thirteenth century Muslim civilisations dominated world culture, accepting, adopting, using, and preserving the study of mathematics, philosophy, medicine, and astronomy. Yet this fact is seldom acknowledged today...This amnesia has left a 600-year gap in the history of human thought.... Little of what was discovered and written by Muslim thinkers during the classical period is taught in any educational institution, and when it is, due credit is not given. [2]

The great British scientist Isaac Newton remarked that if he was able to see further than his predecessors, it was because he stood on the shoulders of giants. Among those giants who made possible the scientific revolution in Europe were Ibn Sina, whose ‘Canon of Medicine’ was a standard text for five hundred years; al-Idrisi, the geographer; Ibn Rushd, the philosopher, and a host of other Muslim scientists who had produced the notion of specific gravity, refined Euclid’s theories, perfected geometry, evolved trigonometry and algebra, and made modern mathematics possible by developing Indian numerals and the concept of the zero as a numeral of no place value, an invention crucial to every aspect of technology from that time onwards to the present day. Their Socratic principles of education, so sympathetic to Muslims and so characteristic of the great Islamic teaching institutions of the golden age, are still and are likely to remain universally accepted practices of advanced teaching. It is no exaggeration to say that the original Christian universities of Latin West, at Paris, Bologna and Oxford, indeed the whole European renaissance, received a vital influx of new knowledge from Islam - an influx from which the later Western colleges and universities, including those of North [America], were to benefit in turn. [1]

[Toledo] has so successfully preserved...the evidence of its three-fold culture: magnificent churches, synagogues and mosques. This was an era when each of these cultures, Christian, Jewish and Muslim, retained its independent identity while all worked and came together in a glorious intellectual and spiritual adventure. The legacy was a truly enabling environment conducive to prosperity, harmony, scientific discovery, philosophical insights and artistic flowering - all the defining features of a thriving civilisation. [4]

[Muslim education] should begin now to re-introduce...the work and thought of our great Muslim writers and philosophers. Thus, from the nursery school to the university, the thoughts of the young will be inspired by our own heritage and not that of some foreign culture.... I am not in any way opposed to the literature or the art or the thought of the West. I simply maintain that the Islamic heritage is just as great... [3]
Many hospitals seem to have a limited appreciation of what can be done in [the field of prevention]. Why is this? ... Whenever a bed is utilised by a patient whose disease could have been prevented, our efforts in the area of public health and community health have been confounded. [4]

I have just returned from a fascinating visit to the People’s Republic of China. Their hospitals are organised into a system from rural and municipal, not only by speciality needs, but by integrating ‘traditional’ and ‘Western medicine’ resources. I am told that in certain areas of that vast land, referral links between hospitals at different levels are well-defined and exceptions are clearly understood and recognised. [4]

[Islam] urges the individual to lead a balanced life, one that strives to accommodate both material progress and spiritual well-being. But no man, woman or child can hope to achieve this balance in sickness, illiteracy or squalor. You are all engaged in the most vital business there is - the well being of the people of the world - and I too ... have become deeply involved in the provision of basic health and education, which I believe are crucial stepping stones towards ... self-realisation and growth. [3]

Beyond the individual - the in-patient upon whom the hospital concentrates its resources - there lie vast communities of people whose lives are a cycle of poverty, unpredictability and ill health [for whom] there is no national programme of health care. Twenty percent of the Aga Khan University’s medical curriculum is in Community Health. It introduces young student doctors and nurses to the Kuichiabadi - Karachi’s urban slums - to the needs and ways and responses of people in conditions of poverty, uncertainty and suspicion. [2]

We have seen in the Northern Areas of Pakistan and the Kutchiabadi slums of Karachi that we can engage their energies and intelligence in meeting their own health needs through changed attitudes and behaviour. If poorer, less educated people help define their own health needs, they are more likely to mobilise the resources to satisfy them - thereby distributing cost and preempting the enormous economic burden that health services now impose upon the developing world. [2]

Children need to be cared for from the time they are conceived until they reach maturity and I strongly advise expectant mothers to come here regularly. [1]
[T]he Qur’an-e-Sharif, rich in parable and allegory, metaphor and symbol, has been an inexhaustible well-spring of inspiration, lending itself to a wide spectrum of interpretations.... [I]ts passages have inspired works of art and architecture, and shaped attitudes and norms that have guided the development of Muslim artistic traditions.... Scientific pursuits, philosophic inquiry and artistic endeavour are all seen as the response of the faithful to the recurring call of the Qur’an to ponder the creation as a way to understand Allah’s benevolent majesty. [1]

Using rock crystal’s iridescent mystery as an inspiration for [Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat], does indeed provide an appropriate symbol of the Timelessness, the Power and the Mystery of Allah as the Lord of Creation. [2]

[Islam’s] ethics always guide my activities, whether it be within the institutions I try to establish or in the interpretations I give concerning important theological problems. Islam is a way forever - for today and for tomorrow. [3]

In the face of this changing world ... confronted with a fundamental challenge to our understanding of time, surrounded by a foreign fleet of cultural and ideological ships which have broken loose, I ask, do we have a clear, firm and precise understanding of what Muslim Society is to be in times to come? [W]here else can we search then in the Holy Qur’an, and in the example of Allah’s last and final Prophet? ... We are blessed that the answers drawn from these sources guarantee that neither now, nor at any time in the future will we be going astray. [4]

A healthy sense of public integrity, in my view, will be difficult to nurture over time without a strong religious underpinning. In the Islamic tradition, the conduct of one’s worldly life is inseparably intertwined with the concerns of one’s spiritual life - and one cannot talk about integrity without also talking about faith.... From that perspective, I would put high among our priorities, both within and outside the Islamic world, the need to renew our spiritual traditions.... I fully understand the West’s historic commitment to separating the secular from the religious. But for many non-Westerners, including most Muslims, the realms of faith and of worldly affairs cannot be antithetical. If "modernism" lacks a spiritual dimension, it will look like materialism. And if the modernising influence of the West is insistently and exclusively a secularising influence, then much of the Islamic world will be somewhat distanced from it. [5]

[3] Jeune Afrique Interview (translation), Coumba Diop, ‘Ethics of Islam guides all my work’ (Mali or Côte d’Ivoire) 21 September 2005
[5] School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, Commencement Address (Columbia, USA) 15 May 2006
The story of the Ismaili community in East Africa goes back well before the start of my Imamah, at least as far back as the middle of the 19th century. Various Aga Khan institutions have been active here for more than 100 years—ever since my late grandfather founded the first Aga Khan Girls School in Zanzibar in 1905.

If you accelerate women’s education ahead of men’s education you create an imbalance in the local community.....

Traditional social relations are so strong that the educated girl opposite the uneducated boy is an equation for disaster. There are societies... where the educated woman will not find a husband because she’s educated. So you need to be very, very careful in handling these things, because they can be a real boomerang if you get them wrong.... So there are a lot of criteria there and it’s a difficult problem. But it’s one that needs to be handled with immense care.

In each of these areas where we feel the greatest need for capacity building, we have been extremely conscious of the fact that opportunities must be created for women. This is why we are targeting women as major beneficiaries with regard to the income generation activities related to agriculture, the training of nurses, the professional education of teachers and for receipt of micro-credit.

The respect that is due to women is a very important factor in the Islamic world and in the history of Islam and in the faith itself. And my interpretation is the better educated the woman is the more respect she is going to get in modern civil society. I find it very difficult to validate the concept, for example, that Islam says a woman cannot be educated. Or that Islam says that a woman cannot work.... there will be an acceptance [in the Islamic world] that women must function and try to function in civil society in a proper, overt manner.... I certainly see a change occurring, I think it’ll take time.

When this university was conceived, Nursing was one of the founding concerns that we had. It was a profession that needed support, recognition, enhancement. But it was part of a more significant issue which was the education of women in Pakistan.... For the Aga Khan University, education of women and that they should participate in the development of this institution and in the development of the country, is a fundamentally important principle.

[3] Vancouver Sun Interview, Don Goyo (Toronto, Canada) 28 November 2008
In Islam, [daily life and eternal life] are the same thing. One cannot separate faith from the world. This is one of the greatest difficulties that the non-Muslim world has, because the Judaic Christian societies developed with that notion of separation. For the Muslims, that separation is not possible. We are expected to live our faith every day, in every hour.... I would like the non-Muslim societies to accept the values of Islam. If Islam says that we do not separate the world from faith, the Western world should accept that. I would go further and say: it is a wonderful way to live! It is an extraordinary blessing to be able to live our faith everyday! ... I am not criticising anyone. I am saying that secular society, by the nature of secularity and the demands of time, provokes in people the need to first place the world and faith after. This is not a part of Islam. [4]

The ethics of Islam bridge the realms of faith on the one hand and practical life on the other: what we call Din and Duniya. [2] [There is] a compatibility between the faith and the world in which the faith is practised at any given time. And I am not willing to make any compromise on that compatibility ... [6] In Shia Islam we don’t differentiate between faith and world. We look at life in its totality, in the context of the individual and the external situation. Forgoing one for the other is contrary to at least our interpretation of Islam. [3]

[O]ne of the specifics of Islam is that you live your faith. And you are not one day in your faith and the next day out of your faith. It is a permanent presence. It is a presence which brings you happiness. It brings you objectives in life ... It is a permanency of thought, of attitude, of ethics. So that’s really what it is. [5] [T]here is no choice between leading a normal life or a faithful life. [7]

[The] divide that used to happen between education and faith and education and the real world is one which I think, we have to reconsider.... That does not mean that you give up education and religion. What it means is that you complete it. So that if you enter the educational process, you enter into a complete stream rather than a split stream. [5]