"We have been working in Pakistan for many years and Pakistan, fortunately, like many other developing countries, is moving to what we call a merit-based educational system. This is good for the country. But we found that the children from Northern Areas were being increasingly marginalised in a merit-based educational system, because the quality of teaching throughout the Northern Areas was insufficient to allow young boys and girls to compete in national merit-based educational system. This was a regional issue. It had nothing to do whether the schools were private or public schools or how long they had been in existence. It was a regional problem.

"Secondly, it was not specific to Pakistan. There are a number of countries, such as the countries of East Africa, where for historic or other reasons, communities have failed to develop educational system that allows them to maintain their position in merit based educational system. So the problem that we were seeking to address was this: What could be done for education in the Northern Areas that would improve the quality of education right across the Northern Areas so that the young men and young women of this part of Pakistan would be able to develop their future and sustain their opportunities in a merit-based educational system? And the answer is behind me."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2000 address at the Professional Development Centre, Northern Areas, Opening Ceremony (Gilgit, Pakistan)

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