Excerpt: His Highness the Aga Khan on AKDN -- its goals, strategies and methods

by NANOWISDOMS ARCHIVE OF IMAMAT SPEECHES, INTERVIEWS AND WRITINGS

"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. The network operates in 35 of the poorest countries in the world and is statutorily secular. This tableau is of course merely a momentary snapshot of a constantly evolving process, but its contours are clearly defined enough today for us to speak about goals, strategy and method.

"The goal is clear: The aim is to create or strengthen civil society in developing countries. This single goal, when it is achieved, is in fact necessary and sufficient to ensure peaceful and stable development over the long term, even when governance is problematic.

"As regards the strategy, civil society obviously cannot exist without apolitical and secular civil institutions, in particular social, cultural and economic ones. The essence of our development strategy is thus to create these where they are lacking or need to be reinforced.

"Lastly, the method: It first involves answering the question as to whether it is the right moment to create the institution and, in the affirmative, to bring together the human and financial resources to get it off the ground.

"The various organisations within the AKDN fall into two categories which both share the same goal of supporting development: commercial companies (grouped together into the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development, known as AKFED) and those non-profit enterprises which I call 'para-companies,' that work toward social or cultural goals. The reason for this dual structure is that civil society cannot emerge solely by starting businesses or solely by building hospitals, schools and universities or cultural facilities."

His Highness the Aga Khan's Acceptance Address – 2009 Nouvel Economiste Philanthropic
Entrepreneur of the Year Award (Paris, France)

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