Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on the role of Imams in Islam, whether Shia or Sunni

**Antonio Marujo/Faranaz Keshavjee:** Are we looking at powerful businessman or a religious Muslim leader?

**Aga Khan:** No, I have nothing to do with entrepreneurship; in Islam, an Imam, whether Shia or Sunni, has responsibilities, firstly for the safety of the community; secondly, he is responsible for the quality of material life, for the daily lives. The nature of Imamat is, therefore, of becoming involved in activities, which will have a direct impact on the quality of people’s lives.

If this work is undertaken under the name of Aga Khan, it is undertaken in the name of the Imamat and not under the Aga Khan’s personal name. I have undertaken some personal initiatives is several companies, but do not hold anything which may have resulted from them, because I have other issues which I am concerned with.

**Antonio Marujo/Faranaz Keshavjee:** Don’t you really have anything?

**Aga Khan:** The only thing, which is still private, is a long tradition in the organisation of horse racing and horse breeding, which my children have given continuity to. But I am not, or ever will be, an entrepreneur.

I am the sole shareholder of the Aga Khan Development Network, but I never withdraw dividends, because the objective is to serve from the resources, and not to make them personal. The notion that an institution carrying the name Aga Khan is personal is incorrect,
whether it is a university, a school or a project in the field of microfinance.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2008 Paroquias de Portugal interview with Antonio Marujo and Faranaz Keshavjee (Lisbon, Portugal) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8861/

Jean-Jacques Lafaye: You are the embodiment of the Imamat. Your co-religionists see you as their ‘lord and master.’ What form does your leadership take?

Aga Khan: In both Sunni and Shia Islam, the Imam is responsible for the quality of life of those who look to him for guidance and for overseeing the practice of the faith. There is no division as there is, for example, in the Christian interpretation, between the material and the spiritual. The Imam’s responsibility covers both domains. Hence, his first concern is for the security of his followers; his second is for their freedom to practice their religion; his third is for their quality of life, as I have just mentioned. I repeat, the Imamat is an institution whose two-fold mission is to guarantee quality of life and to interpret the faith.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2010 Politique Internationale Interview with Jean-Jacques Lafaye, ‘The Power of Wisdom’ (Paris, France)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9473/

"In all interpretations of Islam, Imams are required to lead not only in interpreting the faith but also in improving the quality of life for the people who refer to them. This ethical premise is the foundation of the Aga Khan Development Network, which has long been serving the developing world without regard to ethnicity, gender or race."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2005 address to the International Press Institute, 54th General Assembly (Nairobi, Kenya)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7292/
"In Islam, imams whether they are Shia or Sunni, they have a duty to serve people. That is the nature of imamat and, therefore, in countries where the Ismaili Imamat can bring support and help, it is our duty to do so and we’re very happy to do so in Central Asia, like we are doing so in the Indian sub-continent, we’re doing so in East Africa, in West Africa. So it’s part of the mandate of any Imam. But it’s a big mistake to think that you can do development only for Muslim communities. Many countries have mixed communities and therefore you have to do development for all the people within a given area whether they are Muslim or Christian or Jewish or Hindu or Sikh. You have what I would call a civil responsibility."

*His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2008 remarks to the press (Central Asia)*
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10365/