His Highness the Aga Khan's concern with the 'processes of change': the engines of appropriate, sustainable improvement

by NANOWISDOMS ARCHIVE OF IMAMAT SPEECHES, INTERVIEWS AND WRITINGS,

"In the Occident what I have found challenging and interesting is the concept of change; and the acceptance that the world does evolve, society evolves, man himself evolves. The concept of the static individual in a static society, in a static civilisation is totally in conflict with Western philosophy....

"[The Ummah has] been faced with a historical question: how does government change in an Islamic country? What are the political forms which are acceptable within Islam, acceptable within our time; how do they function? And that has caused a large number of different forms of government, of processes of change -- some inherited, some new. The fact is that there has been a lot of change. That destabilises, it breaks continuity in development. I think we have to try and find solutions to that problem."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1985 Pakistan Television Corporation Interview (Karachi, Pakistan)

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3209/

"That reality was, that [in the middle of the previous century] the industrialised world was dominating the processes of change in the Third World, in particular in the Islamic world. And, that domination resulted in an educational process, or educational processes, in the Islamic world, and in the Third World generally, which were First World driven....
"If you go back to the 1950s onwards, what do you see in the Islamic world? You see colonialism; you see poverty; you see the Cold War; and you see, essentially, government-driven processes of change. You see centralised economic planning. You see the need to create a sense of nation in a number of countries that were not yet independent."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2002 Architectural Record interview with Robert Ivy (New York, USA)

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6147/

"I think we're going to go through a long period of search for new democratic formats in the developing world....You have other countries where the level of authority of the provinces versus the centre becomes a major issue, and where the provinces have sought powers which the centre probably should have and doesn't have. So you get the centrifugal forces in these countries in a sense making central national thinking extremely difficult to implement.

"You get the difficulty in changing legislation. Many of these countries have inherited colonial legislation in one area or the other -- particularly in, for example, education, economic institutions etc. They find it difficult to change that legislation.

"Very often the background to that legislation is an attempt to control rather than to empower. So instead of the legislation coming into the public domain with the goal of enabling change, it's actually very often drafted on the premise of control and centralisation.

"So I think that we are going to be seeing a large number of situation[s] -- you can think of Afghanistan, you can think of Kenya, you can think of Uganda, Eastern Europe, you see these situations all over the world. And I think it will require a lot of patience and wisdom and care to develop systems that are going to work, which do represent a consultative process which we all consider equitable and solid and good, that allow the processes of change in government to occur in an organised way, but that at the same time don't create a situation where there is tremendous volatility all the time in the environment. "

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2008 Vancouver Sun Interview with Don Cayo (Vancouver, Canada)
Pranay Gupte: When you talk about worrying about continuity, beyond the temporal -- since you're both a temporal leader and a spiritual leader -- does that really extend to the liturgy of Islam?

Aga Khan: Yes, it does because, first of all, of the plurality of tradition within Islam. Secondly, the processes of change, if they do occur, are very sensitive indeed. And they need to be very carefully thought through. It is an area where enormous wisdom, enormous knowledge, enormous sensitivity has got to be there. So that process is one of the issues that will go well past my lifetime. Well past my lifetime. And, you know, it's something which I inherited, that I have worked with -- as you know, I have a degree in Islamic History and, therefore, I am comfortable in thinking about these issues. But they are highly sensitive.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1999 Pranay Gupte Interview (United States, United Kingdom)

Unfortunately, views and thought habits, although intangible, are less easily broken than bricks and politics. Learned human behaviour dies hard.

"The world has become a hurtling place in which change occurs constantly and in which we need to learn again to evolve. Free now, from an artificial tug-o-war in which most were only expected to identify with the rope, we are facing a world of doubt and questioning, and universal uncertainty, the new hallmark of our time. Growing from our thawing earth today, is the unsure and uncomfortable process of discovering and learning about mobility and change. In all societies, disconcerting but pertinent questions are being asked: Who will lead in the process of change? What beliefs should guide us? Will they be scientific statements and data or philosophical visions? What constraints or opportunities will shape our future? What are the priorities that we must address first, and why should they be priorities? That these questions are asked and answered correctly should be a source of concern to us all. Because if the responses do not come principally from those of us fortunate enough to have been educated, fortunate enough to have food
and medicine and shelter, who can make progress in providing these things to the less fortunate, the responses will come from the contestations of the excluded...."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1996 Brown University Commencement Ceremony address (Providence, Rhode Island, USA)

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5089/

"[The Aga Khan Development Network is] field driven and we look at parts of Asia and Africa where we hope we can be effective, where the Network can come together. And one other characteristic of the Network is that it's not a banking system in the sense that the Network commits and commits without time limit to the processes of change."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2008 Syrian TV Interview with Reem Haddad (Aleppo, Syria)

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9004/

"In the developing world, at least, we have an enormous amount of mediocrity. Standards are terribly, terribly low and unless those standards are enhanced ... you are not making a permanent contribution to the processes of change."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2008 Irish Times interview with Alison Healy (Maynooth, Ireland)

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8845/

"We are trying to create new processes of change, and encourage others to look at those new forms of change and to assist them to create capacities, and this is where education comes in."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2006 remarks at the Luncheon announcing the merger of the Bellerive Foundation and Aga Khan Foundation (Geneva, Switzerland)

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7716/
"New forms of knowledge are resisted because they change society ... When these new forces come to play you very often get reactions which stymie that. And then the question is what do you do about it? I think in our experience it's been essentially generational. It's gender and generation -- those are the two things that condition those processes of change."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2008 Vancouver Sun Interview with Don Cayo (Vancouver, Canada)

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9087/

Aga Khan: I would say security, civil society, and a meritocratic approach to development, particularly in regard to human resources, because those three elements brought together could underwrite a continuous process of change....

John Stackhouse: You mentioned meritocratic development. Can you expand on that please?

Aga Khan: Well, I think in countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, areas of Pakistan also, many areas throughout the developing world, the competence of younger generations is an absolutely essential issue. If you can harness that competence and you have competent younger generations, they will underwrite the processes of change. If you don't have educated youth, then you will have nothing to work with. You have to try to change older generations' attitudes, you have to try to teach them new knowledge. And we certainly found that the whole development process is accelerated massively when small communities have one or two young educated people who are going to run with the endeavour. These are not necessarily big communities either.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2010 Globe and Mail Interview (4th) with John Stackhouse (Toronto, Canada)

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9392/

Aga Khan: The fact that we're able to rebuild pride in [Islamic] culture -- which is not a
culture in the past, but must be one of today and tomorrow also -- brings a totally different psychological attitude to the process of change....

Richard Engel: How do you see the conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan affecting the Islamic world? Do you see stability in that part of the world?

Aga Khan: I think it will take a long time. I think it's very dangerous to generalise about these situations, but there are some characteristics that are common and one of them is acute poverty. Northwest Pakistan, northern Waziristan, southern Waziristan, most of Afghanistan, these are areas of the world with horrible poverty. So I think the first thing is to try to replace that fear of poverty and the pain that goes with it by some sense of hope in the future, that things don't have to be that way but they can change.

Secondly, what is the process of change? How do you bring stability? I believe very strongly in civil society. What I've seen in the past 50 years is that civil society is the best guarantor of change.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2010 NBC Interview with Richard Engel (USA)

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9644/

Robert Ivy: ... What is the interrelationship, if you will, of this large and vast network of programs that you have and government today?

Aga Khan: I'm not sure that there's an interrelationship with a government as a government. I think the interrelationship is with the entities of civil society. And I think it's the entities of civil society which are going to be the carriers of change in the years ahead. In fact, this program is attempting to invest in the carriers of civil society. It's in education, it's in community organisations, it's in financing agencies, it's affecting the pillars of civil society, I think, which will become the anchors of change....

[W]e're engaged in a number of areas which are impacting the quality of life and the way change occurs. And we're looking at countries in the developing world which are exploring new forms of government. But exploring new forms of government alone could be a perilous exercise. And that's why there is such necessity to build human capacity, to underwrite the processes of change. And that's what I mean by civil societies....

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2005 remarks in the National Building Museum Panel
By working in historic cities, you're actually moving to support the poor of the poorest. By upgrading them, you get new economic opportunities and you cause the process of change to occur. Giving people confidence in their hope is the most driving force for change. Being able to live in an environment of hope, that changes society completely."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2005 press conference remarks at al-Azhar Park, Cairo, reported by Maria Cook of the Ottawa Citizen (Ottawa, Canada)

"Our experience from Aleppo to Zanzibar has taught us that private initiative, properly applied and encouraged, can help revitalise historic cities of the Islamic world, even in resource-poor environments. Through interventions ranging from micro-finance, skills development, healthcare and sanitation, to investment in high-end tourism and urban development, we have been able to catalyse a process of change which an empowered local population itself will have the capacity to sustain."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2003 remarks to the press while in Mali (Timbuktu, Djenne & Bamako, Mali)

Robert Ivy: Unlike other award programmes in which highly-touted architects dominate the short-lists, the Aga Khan Award programme regularly confers honour on lesser-known individuals and communities. What effects have these decisions produced?

Aga Khan: That is one of the things which the Award has tried to respond to -- it has looked at how society causes change, not how architects cause change, and it has tried to help societies to improve the processes of change....
Aga Khan: I will be talking about things that I have not talked about before. Your questions prompted me to think back to what the situation was when I became the Imam in 1957. The first ten years of Imamat caused me to become more and more involved in what you call architecture and what I would call the processes of change....

When the Award started, the question arose about whether we were talking about that small window of 'architectured' buildings in this enormous environment or whether we were talking about the whole process of change of that environment? ...

Very early on there was consensus that the Aga Khan Award could not be just for 'architectured' buildings, it had to be an award for quality buildings no matter what the process of their creation. We were looking at bringing those processes on board and enhancing them, rather than saying there is a divide between the professionally trained architect and the builder who comes out of a traditional society, who is a fantastic artist, but who may not have all the technical niceties of the modern architect. The Award was very definitely an initiative to recognise the processes of building quality.

Philip Jodidio: The situation has changed a great deal since you created the Award in the late 1970s. Do you feel a need for the Award to evolve?

Aga Khan: I think that the Award must evolve. Institutions that do not evolve tend to get marginalised. There are needs ahead of us which must be addressed by the Award. The biggest concern I would have is to recognise the processes of change, and to be certain that the Award plays an appropriate role in working with those processes so that they are not exclusive of quality in design or environmental concerns....
"[L]et me get back, first of all, to why the award has got such a variety of projects which it looks at. When the award was founded, the question was asked, 'What are the processes of change and who is being affected by the processes of change?' And the decision was taken, I think, correctly, to say that the award wanted to cover the widest spectrum of processes of change in the developing world.

"And the processes of change are not restricted to the wealthy. They're not restricted to architect-built buildings. They're not restricted to urban environments. The majority of the population in many of these countries is rural. Therefore, we took the decision that if the award wanted to impact the processes of change, then it had to have the opportunity and the ability to make decisions on all these different levels of activity. And this was a decision that was taken after considerable discussion. And I hope and believe time will show that it has been correct."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2005 remarks in the National Building Museum Panel Discussion at the Scully Seminar/Symposium (Washington D.C., USA)

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9765/

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ ~~~~~~~~~~~~~ ~~~~~~~~~~~~~ ~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Click here for this post in PDF format.
Click here to review our extended quotes organised by theme.
Click here to review our short quotes organised by theme.
Click here to subscribe and receive our Facebook posts by e-mail.

[NOTE: For some reason NanoWisdoms' Facebook posts do not always appear in many Facebook newsfeeds due to a problem in Facebook and/or individual newsfeed settings. Please visit our wall to review all our posts if you do not always see our posts. Thank you.]

Original URL: