Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on the Aga Khan Music Initiative

"For many years, I have felt that traditional music played such a critical role in the cultures of Central Asia that it deserved attention and assistance. The need became all the more apparent after the countries of the region achieved independence and began the process of redefining themselves. For the new countries of Central Asia, the inherent pluralism of their societies can be an asset rather than a liability."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2003 Remarks to the press (Dushanbe, Tajikistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6635/

"Last year the Aga Khan Trust for Culture joined the Silk Road Project created by Yo-Yo Ma to support a variety of projects aimed at broadening the understanding and appreciation of the musical and artistic cultures of the Silk Road that linked the West with Asia and the Middle East -- including Syria -- for over a thousand years. This collaboration is taking many forms, one of which we have been privileged to experience today. It also includes a series of activities led by the Trust for Culture designed to stimulate interest in traditional music within and between countries in Central Asia and the Middle East. This work owes a great deal to Yo-Yo Ma’s vision, creativity, boundless energy and infectious enthusiasm, and most of all to his genuine interest and respect for the creative expression of peoples embodied in the rich diversity of their cultures."
"I should like you to consider the complex history, diversity and inventiveness of the music of countries like Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan or Afghanistan. Sadly I discovered that the musical cultures of Central Asia were struggling for the reasons I gave a moment ago. Not only were they being consigned to oblivion, but the musical models imposed on them from outside, often with ulterior political motives, were creating a colourless cultural uniformity. These processes have resulted in a loss of identity, not only in the field of music discussed here, but also in many others....

"With regard to the example of music used here, through the Trust we met the challenge by creating the Aga Khan Music Initiative. We called this project the 'Silk Road', since all the countries concerned were situated along that unique route linking China and Europe.

"The long-term objective is: to boost education and research; to train new generations of young artists; to contribute to the revival of festivals, concerts and performances in the countries from which the music originated; to bring the music to audiences not only in neighbouring countries, but also in other Muslim countries and the West.

"We are now witnessing a true musical revival in these faraway countries. Furthermore, the great advantage of this type of programme is that it not only promotes cultural pluralism, but also underscores the legitimate function of pluralism as a principle of social organisation, which may be harder to comprehend. Although this result cannot be measured with the tools of an economist, it unfailingly contributes every time to a renewed awareness of specific cultural characteristics and a considerable improvement in the quality of life. This is no doubt the reason why, when a
community has witnessed and participated in an experiment to promote pluralism, it is eager to see it applied in other areas."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2008 Address to the Avignon Forum ‘The value and importance of cultural diversity and its role in promoting peace and development’ (Avignon, France)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9065/

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