Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on the Aga Khan University - Part 1/5: Rationale, vision and hopes

"There are of course many reasons for a large number of trained Pakistani doctors remaining abroad, often in very eminent posts, but I hope that with new medical institutions such as this, there will be much greater incentives for qualified men and women to return. This institution alone will create a number of senior and junior teaching posts.

"I also intend that it should set a standard of quality which will automatically attract professional staff who might otherwise have been tempted to remain abroad. To perform their best work and to continue developing their professional abilities, the medical profession needs suitably conceived premises, research facilities and an appropriate professional environment. This is where, once again, a new institution such as the one we are about to build can make a major contribution."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1971 Aga Khan Hospital and Medical College Foundation Stone Ceremony address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1722/

"The Aga Khan University is now 20 years old, but its aspirations were formed in the 1970s -- nearly a generation ago. Some ten years ago, the Chancellor’s Commission re-examined the university’s goals and intentions that were set down in the Harvard Report of 1983 and found them to be no less salient. The Commission strongly reaffirmed AKU’s commitment to be, in its words, an 'open, Muslim university, devoted to free inquiry of distinction, quality and international character, preparing its students for constructive, worthwhile and responsible roles in society.' ..."
"Muslim universities, however, have a unique responsibility: to engender in their societies a new confidence. It must be a confidence based on intellectual excellence, but also on a refreshed and enlightened appreciation of the scientific, linguistic, artistic and religious traditions that underpin and give such global value to our own Muslim civilisations -- even though it may be ignored or not understood by parts of the Ummah itself."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2003 Aga Khan University Convocation Ceremony address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6830/

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"It may be asked why I wished to establish the Aga Khan University here in Pakistan. That question may be answered by a simple analogy. If you plant a tree, you plant for future generations to enjoy its shade. But you must plant in soil which is good today, soil from which the sapling can draw the nourishment to grow to full maturity. This will be a Muslim university and Pakistan lies near the geographical centre of the Muslim Ummah, a world community of the faithful which stretches as far east as Indonesia and as far west as Morocco. Pakistan is typical of many Muslim countries, with the same problems, the same needs, the same aspirations. Furthermore, it is a rising force in Islam. Though not endowed with the immense wealth of some neighbouring states, Pakistan has become a valued partner throughout the Middle Eastern region, offering both technical and human resources to development while its economy is achieving constant growth despite the present world recession."

"The overall aim of the Aga Khan University will be to make clear and rational judgements as to which foreseeable future needs of the developing countries require new educational programmes and, having identified those openings, to address them by the appropriate means, setting the highest standards possible whether in teaching, research or service.

"The progress of the School of Nursing has already been mentioned. Its concept illustrates our aims and methods. The School derived from the
serious shortage of qualified nurses in Pakistan, a shortage partly attributable to their low social standing.... We hope next to introduce something which has never before been available in Pakistan, namely a degree in nursing. So the School is fulfilling precisely those aspirations which I have outlined for the university. It is meeting a carefully identified requirement, raising standards and introducing new concepts....

"The Aga Khan University has a number of constituencies to which the Charter encourages it to respond and with which it must keep faith: the Pakistan nation; the Islamic Ummah, including my own Ismaili community; the Third World countries of Asia and Africa. As I have already indicated it must address itself to subjects relevant to the development and civilisations of these constituencies, if possible, responding to challenges in an international context."

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2817/

"Foremost, the Aga Khan University is dedicated to formulating and testing ideas for solving problems of Pakistan, the Ummah and the rest of the developing world. Like other universities, it is committed to advancing society by educating its most talented people. Distinctively, it seeks models for pursuing that advancement in ways that reconcile the ethic of Islam with the infinitude of possibilities that characterises the modern Western world. Allow our societies to benefit from those possibilities without being unnecessarily confused or unbalanced by them. For example, we encourage our students to achieve great individual success in their profession, but we try to help them retain a sense of responsibility to serve the community from which they come."

http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4486/
"The Aga Khan University has been described as a 'problem-oriented university' -- a description of which we should all be proud. It explains why we focused so sharply on the fields of health and education in our early days -- these were the sectors where our planners identified as the most urgent problems. And they are still areas of central concern. But with the passage of time, we have come to see that meeting the problems of any one sector increasingly requires an understanding of other sectors -- and that the best way to broaden our impact is to broaden our reach."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2006 Aga Khan University Convocation Ceremony address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7997/

"It may be appropriate today to recall some of the challenges we have faced since the announcement of the project in 1964.

"Those 21 years have been turbulent ones throughout the world. Inflation has ravaged currencies. The pattern of health problems on the subcontinent has altered. Pakistan itself has been scarred by war and its land torn by earthquakes....

"During those two decades, health experts gradually came to appreciate that the most pressing health problems for 80 percent of Third World populations are ones involving primary health care. Few hospitals had taken this into account, because it had taken so long to come fully into focus. Our planners adapted the project accordingly and we have greatly benefited from those advisers who improved our comprehension of what was required.

"As a result, our original concept of a small Medical College with its 120 bed hospital attached to an existing university and training doctors for work in urban hospitals was abandoned to be replaced by an independent university, with its own Faculty of Health Science and a 721 bed hospital devoting one third of its resources to primary health care. These profound changes caused delays and a substantial escalation of the cost of project,
which rose from $10 million at 1964 prices to $300 million in 1980. The medical complex we are inaugurating is profoundly different and a much more sophisticated project than that we conceived in 1964....

"Whilst open to all, the Aga Khan University is to be an Islamic Institution. It will draw upon the great historical tradition of Muslim’s learning, the heritage of such philosophers and scientists as ar-Razi and al-Biruni, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd. In the true spirit of this tradition, it will also address the higher educational needs of Muslims as they face this new 15th century of the Hijra."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1985 Faculty of Health Sciences of the Aga Khan University and Aga Khan University Hospital Inauguration Ceremony address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3202/

"Few, if any, of our world's great civilisations have developed without the benefit of outstanding intellects, concentrated in institutions which very early on were recognised as foci of knowledge, or universities. There can be no doubt that the apogee of many great civilisations -- Chinese, Christian and Muslim -- was attained when their societies had given birth to, or were benefiting from, unique centres of learning. For more than 700 years, Muslim leaders ensured the development of world class universities that flourished on cutting edge research and vast libraries. The spread of knowledge was profound in scale and scope. It was a priority focus which energetically occupied the highest leadership elements of the Muslim Empires of the Omayyads, the Abbasids, the Fatimids, the Nasrids of Spain, the Almoravids of Morocco, the West African Kingdoms and the expansive territories of the Mughals, Safavids, Ottomans, the Khanates of Central Asia and the Sultanates of Malaysia and Indonesia. The Muslim world was richly rewarded by these centres of learning which cradled the flourishing of Islamic civilisations and formed the crucible for an explosion of creativity and scholarship in medicine, science, art, literature, philosophy and architecture.

"It is against this background of historical greatness, recent academic decline and urgent social need that the Aga Khan University was
conceived. We exist because there is strong logic that we should....

"After thoroughly examining a wide range of alternatives, the university focused on development concepts which emphasised offering educational programs of excellence to students who are likely to make significant contributions to their societies. It stressed the need to develop more insightful research on critical issues, and to set examples of high quality education that could exert a constructive influence on other centres of learning within and beyond the Muslim world. In summary, if our university is to be useful to Pakistan and the developing world, we must not simply do things which are done well elsewhere. We must, rather, focus on what needs to be improved, and resolve to do it better than before and, indeed, better than at most other institutions. To fulfil its role, and remain true to its Charter, the university must continue to grow. It must continue to improve its capabilities to impart knowledge and solve complex problems which increasingly have their roots in global issues. It must increase its capability to operate on a world scale in order to be effective at a community level. It must not be time-bound if it is to stay ahead of the rapid pace of global technological change."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1996 Aga Khan University Convocation Ceremony address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5197/

"Events both within and outside the Muslim world in the last decade have meant that AKU faces a more challenging vocation as a Muslim university than it did at its founding. Activist Islamic movements have voiced their principled opposition to the Western world, its values and personal behaviour. The antipathy of militant Islamic movements to forms of government in Muslim countries built on Western models has likewise been profound. These reactions seem related to frustrations over failures, and disappointments at the benefits, brought by modern secular knowledge and institutions. The force of religious ideas is welcome and can be expected throughout the world in the coming decades. But the need for enlightened expression of what it means to be Muslim in the 21st century will be, if anything, increased. A Muslim university could usefully counter some of the stymieing tendencies that have appeared in the last
years by emphasising more enlightened and tolerant conceptions that from our beginning have been mainsprings of Muslim culture and world outlook. AKU, as a Muslim university, could be a useful model for those seeking to combine secular education with Islam.”

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1994 Aga Khan University Convocation Ceremony, 10th Anniversary Address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4793/

PTV: The Aga Khan University is a very great gift. Did you have any specific reason in your mind while choosing Pakistan for it? I am sure our viewers will like to know.

Aga Khan: (Chuckles) Well let me go back to the genesis of the problem. In 1964 there was an insufficiency of facilities for training doctors in Pakistan. And there was a request that I should assist, as I have done in other parts of the world, to develop a teaching hospital. This I did. And yesterday I explained some of the reasons why that teaching hospital changed from a teaching hospital to an independent university with a charter which enabled it to develop faculties even outside Pakistan, if necessary.

Why I started with a teaching hospital in 1964? Why I accepted that was that we already had in Pakistan a very large network of health units. They had no focal point. They had no apex health institution. Now that was a Pakistani concept. But then with the President, we started asking the questions of where is Pakistan within the Ummah and what should a new university in Pakistan be in relation to the Ummah and in relation to the Third World? From there concepts expanded to what the institution is today....

PTV: Before I ask you another question, I would like to ask Your Highness, something more interesting from the point of view of our viewers. What, Your Highness, has been the most pleasant moment of your life?

Aga Khan: Ah! the most pleasant moment of my life. (Pause) You know,
man's mind is not perfect, and to reconstitute all the important events in my life would be very difficult.

I think what is important in any man's life is the satisfaction he gets from what he does. And certainly yesterday was one of the important days in my life because it is not given to every man to create a new university. It is not given to every man to receive the sort of support that I think this university has received. It is not given to every man to say that maybe an institution has come into existence that might one day have a significant impact on people who are important in my life.

**PTV:** In other words you like to see it grow?

**Aga Khan:** Yes.

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"Higher education has a special importance because of the difference it can make by developing new models and standards for other institutions in society, and by inculcating in its students the skills of critical thinking, analysis and problem solving, underpinned by a strong grasp of moral reasoning, ethics and respect for others. While our world may be changing at a rate unprecedented in human history, it is not all positive. Negative changes are numerous; disrupting societies as evidenced by the violence that we see in so many parts of the world today. Positive change that is permanent requires strong institutions at all levels of society, and institutional development requires models, and capable and enlightened leadership....

"The questions most commonly asked when people learn that I am founding a new university are: 'How many students will it have' and 'when will the construction of buildings begin?' From my perspective the questions should be:

"Given all the current problems in that country, and all the existing universities, why start another university?"
"What will it teach?

"What are your expectations for the impact that the institution and graduates will have? and finally,

"How secure is its funding over time?

"I believe that institutions of higher education have greater prospects for success for their students and for the societies they serve when they focus on four factors: quality, relevance, impact and resources.

"The decision to create the Aga Khan University -- or AKU as we refer to it -- as the first private university in Pakistan, more than twenty years ago, was taken in the context of the deteriorating quality of higher education in the developing world. As a private university, AKU would have to remain small, but to justify the investment required it would have to become a role model for a country of more than 120 million people. To assume and retain this status AKU had to be a quality institution not only in terms of its academic offerings, but also in terms of admission and financial aid policies, governance, management and its financial health....

"But quality is not enough to justify the support of donors, society and the authorities in a developing country: a university’s offerings must also be relevant. Following a study carried out with the assistance of Harvard, AKU’s Board decided to focus its initial efforts on addressing the very poor quality of social services in Pakistan and much of the developing world. Today, the Faculty of Health Sciences, including Nursing, and the Institute for Educational Development, are all having an impact beyond the training of students at high levels in their respective fields. They have given new status and recognition to women professionals who constitute an overwhelming majority of teachers and nurses in the region. The Medical College’s Health Sciences Department has developed a pioneering model for treating the community as a patient rather than only the individuals who present themselves for care. A fifth of medical students’ curriculum time is spent in the Community Health Sciences. Nursing students also take part in this activity, and obtain their learning experiences in the rural areas of the country.

"The quality and impact of the university can be further gauged from the fact that over the last fifteen years Pakistan's professional licensing body
has recommended that all medical colleges in Pakistan adopt AKU’s model of community based medical education. Similarly, the Pakistan Nursing Council has adopted AKU’s nursing curriculum. Research has also concentrated on those themes that are relevant and have outcomes that impact society. With respect to the university’s Institute for Educational Development, more than half of all course participants come from government institutions. Here the Institute’s impact is not only visible in the improvements in classrooms and management of government schools, but also in government’s major policy-making fora in which the Institute is invited to participate on a regular basis.

"This is the kind of role that a small private university with strong international connections can play if it focuses on quality, relevance and impact and seeks opportunities to share its experience and human resources with other institutions and society as a whole."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2001 Association of American Universities Centenary Celebration address (Washington D.C., USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5920/

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"Very early on, there was an understanding that this institution if it came into existence in Pakistan, must not become an ivory tower of academia disassociated from the needs of society in Pakistan and elsewhere. Our curriculum was built around the notion that Community Health Sciences had to be a significant part of the education that we give to our young men and women."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1996 Juma Building for Research, Aga Khan University, Foundation Stone Ceremony address (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5182/

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"[T]he university has also designed an innovative curriculum. You [the graduands,] have learned not only about the physiology and pathology of individual human bodies, but also about the anatomy of the health problems of communities. You have worked among the men and women of
the Katchi Abadis, the squatter settlements around Karachi, learning about the causes of disease of people who live in poverty. The university, as planned, has begun to extend its reach, looking outward, beyond this campus... We [are] reminded of the university’s humane mission: its imperative to respond to the needs of the common man. The faculty, I believe, in taking our students to the Katchi Abadis, not only instruct them in the techniques of primary health care for the poor, but also expose them to deeper truths -- our common humanity and worth, humility before great suffering, and recognition of dignity and wisdom among simple people. This is a form of ethical education that must underpin the life of a physician and underlie the professional ethics to which the Prime Minister referred to yesterday so eloquently.”

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1989 Address at the Convocation Ceremony of Graduates from the Faculty of Health Sciences School of Medicine, Aga Khan University (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4351/

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See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on the Aga Khan University - Part 2/5: The School of Nursing

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See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on the Aga Khan University - Part 3/5: Institute for Educational Development

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See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on the Aga Khan University - Part 4/5: Research