Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on globalism - Part 3/7: the vital importance of high standards in the developing world

"[I]t should be said in all candour that the recent history of higher education in numerous less developed countries has been discouraging. Many development policy makers in the 1960’s and 1970’s simply did not see higher education as a priority concern -- instead they incorrectly calculated that they could not justify the cost of higher education from the foreseeable productivity of university graduates. As a result, some African countries which had strong institutions of higher education at the time of their independence, now find themselves unable to achieve even minimum global standards."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2007 Faculty of Health Sciences of the Aga Khan University Inauguration Ceremony address (Nairobi, Kenya)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8189/

Aftab Ahmad Khan: What is your opinion on the choice between mass progress at slow speed and selective progress at high speed?

Aga Khan: As I said earlier, each country will obviously respond within its context but whereas in the fifties and the sixties many basic issues required to be solved and there was justification to look at mass progress at slow speed, such an approach meant an erosion of standards. To take a country out of the international performance criteria would in one sense mean that the country loses its position within the community of nations. Therefore. I think, that even
countries with immense demographic problems are going to accept the principle that there have got to be issues of excellence for all aspects of endeavour, in education, in economy or whatever else may be the area. There have got to be institutions, programmes and endeavours which set standards and those standards have got to be compatible and competitive with international standards. Otherwise, the elite of a given country is just deprived of its potential and once it happens, the country tends to fall back to mediocrity or worse.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1983 Pakistan and Gulf Economist interview with Aftab Ahmad Khan (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2799/

"I think that in Pakistan, like in many other developing countries, the government found itself caught between the desire to serve a large number of students and the desire to maintain standards. You know as well as I do about the demographic explosion in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. It has provoked very great stress on the primary and secondary educational system. While one should, hopefully, avoid denying primary and secondary education to a large number of students, the fact is that in the years ahead (and this is not peculiar to Pakistan, it relates to many countries in Asia and Africa), more attention will have to be given to improving the quality in primary and secondary schools."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1983 Khaleej Times interview with Maruf Khwaja (Dubai, United Arab Emirates)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2789/

"If one key to unlocking the potential of Uganda, and of all of Africa, is a spirit of pluralism, then another key should be a commitment to excellence. There was a time, earlier in my Imamat, when mediocrity was considered tolerable here because it was 'good enough for Africa'. I remember my apprehension at the time, my concern that
among all the goals that were set for Africa in those days, the achievement of normal world-class standards was not seen as realistic. But in the rapidly globalising world of the 21st century, the progress of every country and continent will depend on its ability to meet universal standards. To settle for less is an increasingly dangerous decision. This commitment to achieve global norms, and even to excel, can wisely begin with a nation’s educational institutions and the preparation of our future leaders.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2007 address at the Banquet Hosted in Honour of the President of Uganda (Kampala, Uganda) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8256/

"In our globalised world, the best standards in any one place will quickly become the globe’s standards, and societies which cannot meet these standards will be left behind to face decades of marginalisation."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2007 Golden Jubilee Inaugural Ceremony address (Aiglemont) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8171/

"The broader philosophy of the Aga Khan Development Network is founded on the premise that developing societies deserve the best and that settling for less, though often tempting, is an increasingly dangerous option."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2010 Forward to the Daily Nation 50th Anniversary Special Supplement (Nairobi, Kenya) http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9371/

"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/

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that is the approach we, AKDN, must take in Afghanistan, just as we have done in other post-conflict situations where we have been engaged, such as Tajikistan, Uganda and Mozambique."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2005 Kabul Serena Hotel Opening Ceremony address (Kabul, Afghanistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7550/

"Every developing country I know has been faced with the choice of planning for mass progress at slow speed or selective progress at high speed. No doubt each case must be judged on its merits, but it seems to me that private initiative has a particularly important role to play in setting, maintaining and improving national standards. Whether it be in medicine, education or industry and commerce, quality is expensive but it is as essential to the long-term future of developing countries as it is to the wealthier parts of the world. The search for quality, because it is selective, will inevitably provoke envy, but unless key sectors in the developing countries are allowed to seek the highest standards and remunerate manpower accordingly, I can see no other solution to the vital need to build up a reservoir of national skill. Our developing countries must recognise this and, although selectivity in the search for progress may be politically unappealing, the alternative is an indefinite commitment to mediocrity and thereby to stagnation."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1976 Address to the Swiss-American Chamber of Commerce (Zurich, Switzerland)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1750/

"[T]he Aga Khan Development Network is a support system to national initiative in the countries where we work, to enhance developmental processes, to speed them up, to add quality. So the first thing is to identify the needs. Aga Khan University identified the need of quality higher education in Pakistan. This is not a specific
issue for Pakistan, many countries in the developing world need much, much more sophisticated higher level education. The next point is that, if you create new capacity, it is important to bring to that field, whatever it is, a centre quality. So what we have tried to achieve is the notion of 'best practice'. In the 60s, the 70s there was a long debate -- a political debate -- as to whether developing countries could afford quality. I think that argument doesn’t exist anymore, in the sense that the developing countries, like all countries, need quality institutions. So our objective is going to try to establish as a goal, best practice in what we are doing."

"Many difficult decisions have already marked the history of this young university, but there is one which deserves to be spelt out publicly. Numerous colleges and universities provide undergraduate education to substantial student numbers in the Islamic world. Should we attempt the same, or endeavour to expose a relatively few students, to the best that is internationally available in the belief that we will assist both Pakistan and our wider constituencies more effectively by seeking to train leadership for the future? We have taken a purposeful decision, based on considerable discussion and research, to pursue the latter course; to aim to help raise the standards of medical education....

"Without demonstrable excellence we could neither prepare the next generation for its tasks, nor create an atmosphere of vibrant activity which would stimulate the faculty nor encourage research, nor by example persuade other teaching institutions to set themselves higher targets. This policy has already attracted back some outstanding academic[s] who had earlier left this country. They had departed in search of improved facilities, rewards and most important personal and professional fulfilment. They returned when the intellectual stimulation they had sought became available here, hope many more will do the same. Pakistan needs the skills of its own sons and
daughters."

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/

"I shall be speaking elsewhere about the 'Enabling Environment' in which private enterprise can help develop a country's material resources. Interlocking with it is the Enabling Environment which encourages those people who nurture the nation's fund of human resource. If government, through its laws and attitudes, created a climate of stability, then those professional people will not merely contribute to development, they will of their own volition seek to improve standards. But if the environment is wrong, if it is disabling, then standards will fall, the quacks and the crooks and the corrupt will flourish and the good men and women will despair and leave.

"This is why the Third World must create the Enabling Environment for social institutions to develop. For if the doctors and teachers and managers do not remain -- and there are many countries which they have left -- then no amount of money spent on health and welfare will effectively help the 800 million people who are destitute and miserable in the world today."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1982 Aga Khan Health and Education Services Luncheon address (Nairobi, Kenya)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/2397/

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on globalism - Part 1/7: the 'death of distance'

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on globalism - Part 2/7: competing in a global arena

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on globalism - Part 4/7: the pace of change

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on globalism - Part 5/7: English: the ‘predominant global language’ & ‘of global connection’

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on globalism - Part 6/7: threat to culture and pluralism

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on globalism - Part 7/7: the hazard of a superficial, homogenised mega-culture