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

"I do not think it is necessary to spend time outlining the challenge that the process of globalisation represents vis-a-vis the cultural fabric of our world. But it is not the content of the new media, or even its domination by media giants, that is the real threat. The problem is that large segments of all societies -- in the developing world and the developed world -- are unaware of the wealth of global cultural resources, and therefore of the need to preserve the precious value of pluralism in their own and in other's societies. In this regard, there has unfortunately not been any development that parallels the recent acceptance by international public opinion of the imperative to preserve and enhance our natural environment and the world’s cultural heritage as 'public goods', worthy of general support."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2002 Concluding Address to the Prince Claus Fund Conference on Culture and Development(Amsterdam, The Netherlands)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6351/

Armelle Charrier: Is it that the fact verily of rehabilitating cultural assets, also allows in a context of globalisation to keep the identity of people and places?

Aga Khan: Absolutely! It is first of all the identity of people, but also it is underlining the legitimacy and validity of pluralism.
His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2005 Mali TV5 interview with Armelle Charrier
(Bamako, Mali) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7477/

Reporter: What about globalisation? Was he [the Aga Khan] fighting it with his efforts to encourage architecture, music and historical preservation in developing countries?

Aga Khan: I wouldn’t call it fighting against globalisation. It’s enhancing pluralism. It’s enhancing the right of people to live in their own languages, their own societies with their own value systems at any given time in history.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s remarks at the 2005 Round Table Discussion with the Press at al-Azhar Park’s opening (USA, United Kingdom, Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7284/

"Sustaining cultural integrity is a major issue in many parts of the non-Western world today. How can these cultures survive in the face of the globalisation of communications, and the huge resources of the Western media giants? Cultural institutions could be funded to develop material on all facets of Pakistani culture designed for use in the new media and directed to both domestic and international audiences."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2000 address to the Conference on Indigenous Philanthropy (Islamabad, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5811/

"As Canadians know so well, the idea of pluralism is not a new one in this world. It has honourable and ancient foundations, including
deep roots in Islamic tradition. What is new, today, is that society is
globalised, intimately interconnected and extraordinarily
interdependent.”

His Highness the Aga Khan's remarks at the 2006 Funding Agreement for
the Global Centre for Pluralism Signing Ceremony (Ottawa, Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7929/

"This accelerating wave of interdependence is something we first
defined as 'internationalisation' when the IB programme was
launched 40 years ago. We refer to it now as 'globalisation.' It
brings with it both myriad blessings and serious risks -- not the least
of which is the danger that globalisation will become synonymous
with homogenisation....

"Squaring the particular with the global will require great care,
wisdom, and even some practical field testing, to ensure that it
really is possible to develop a curriculum that responds effectively to
both the global and the tribal impulses. While this will be a feat in
itself, it will also be important to relate well to highly practical
concerns such as the nature of each country's national university
entrance exams, and the the human resources required by each
country's multi-year development plans.

"The Academies have given much thought to the components that we
would describe as global in our curriculum. We intend to place
special emphasis on the value of pluralism, the ethical dimensions of
life, global economics, a broad study of world cultures (including
Muslim Civilisations) and comparative political systems. Experienced
IB teachers have already been helping us to integrate these
important areas of focus into the Academies curriculum....

"Educating for global economics will also be essential to ensure that
the failed economic systems of the past are replaced. But this must
not mean a simplistic acceptance of the imbalances and inequities
associated with today's new global economy. We need to develop a
broad consensus which focuses on creating a global economic
environment which is universally fair....

"Some people tell us that globalisation is an inevitable process. That may be true in certain areas of activity -- but there is nothing inevitable about globalising educational approaches and standards. Conceptualising a global examination system is one of the most difficult intellectual endeavours I can imagine -- though it should also be one of the most exciting. The intellectual stimulation of working on such a project could keep the world's best educators engaged for decades. That task may be more feasible, however, because of the head start which the IB organisation has already made in thinking about a global curriculum. Your IB experience, independent of the Aga Khan Academies, as well as your Peterson lectures through the years offer an excellent foundation for that process."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2008 'The Peterson Lecture' at the Annual Meeting of the International Baccalaureate (Atlanta, Georgia, USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8435/

"One of the central precepts of the International Baccalaureate Programme is to honour world-class standards, while also respecting cultural diversity. In this respect, its approach mirrors that of the Aga Khan Academies -- to help students combine a cosmopolitan spirit on the one hand, with a strong sense of cultural identity on the other. And is that not one of the secrets to success and fulfilment in our rapidly globalising world? Everyone, everywhere, faces the challenge of engaging -- productively and creatively -- in the global arena of action and ideas, while also respecting the unique character of family roots and cultural traditions."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2007 Aga Khan Academy, Kampala, Stone Ceremony address (Kampala, Uganda)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8258/
"As more nations develop increasingly multi-cultural rather than uniform or monolithic profiles, and as the process of globalisation continues apace, educators are confronted by the challenge to provide to the mainstream population of their society, an informed understanding of the culture and history of minorities domiciled in their midst, as well as other major civilisations beyond their shores. It must be said, that in this respect, most of the countries of the West have been staggeringly slow to face up to this challenge, at least as far as Islam is concerned. The media and some opinion-leaders tend, if not to actively perpetrate old cliches and stereotypes, show a lack of anything like a nuanced knowledge or appreciation of the traditions of the Muslim world."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2003 Institute of Ismaili Studies 25th Anniversary Graduation Ceremony address (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6826/

Times of India: Would you elaborate on 'clash of ignorance', the phrase you prefer to Samuel Huntington's now-notorious 'clash of civilisations'?

Aga Khan: Today's world has a new set of opportunities and centrifugal forces in place of the Cold War's context. But the definition of an educated person hasn't changed perceptibly since that of the 1960s; the paradigm of education certainly has not kept pace with globalisation. It does not yet provide a comfort level with pluralism. The West's understanding, its academic context is still Judeo-Christian. It's apprehensions rise from a lack of knowledge about Islam.

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2004 Times of India Interview (New Delhi, India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7094/
**Aghfaq Ahmed:** What are the issues facing the Muslim Umma?

**Aga Khan:** First, the globalisation of the knowledge of the cultures of the Ummah is critical. We have to make known the cultural inheritance of the Muslims to the non-Muslim as well as the Muslim parts of the world because we will never succeed in building the respect and recognition that the Ummah deserves unless we present the Ummah as a remarkable carrier of civilisation. The misconceptions about Islam and Muslims in the West exist because we are, even today, absent from the global civilisation. We should encourage the Western education system to bring in knowledge of the civilisation of Islam into the secondary education system.

---

"Islam knows of diverse evolutions in many corners of the world, even if, in certain environments, the challenge of modernisation and globalisation is lived as fear of Westernisation and loss of identity. In the past, Christianity developed in diverse areas of the Middle East, from Lebanon to Iraq and in Africa, especially during colonialism. Certainly, differences with the West exist, but one must consider the essence and the ethical significance of rules and principals. We will have to question ourselves on values and ethics and on the decadence of a society without rules."

---

"All of us, most closely associated with the Aga Khan University, may have concerns about the magnitude of development challenges which confront us as our university moves towards the twenty first century.... Our task is unusual and without precedent because the
Muslim World as well as the other areas of Africa and Asia have been let loose from the iron grip of the Cold War. Experimentation in statehood and uncertainty in economic direction, including the reversal of long held dogmas, have confronted new efforts for major social progress. New initiatives are delayed, sometimes even frustrated by resistance to the pace of technical and policy change which is required to meet the increasing reality of competitive globalised economies and information availability.

"Because of these complexities, it appears increasingly evident that for institutions such as AKU to succeed, the notion of volatility and change must no longer be viewed with surprise, but with the realism that it is going to be a characteristic of our future environments."

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

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 3/7: the vital importance of high standards in the developing world