Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on Portugal, the new global seat of the Ismaili Imamat

**Antonio Marujo/Faranaz Keshavjee:** How are the projects which you have launched in Portugal? Can we expect to have, in Lisbon, a school of excellence as part of your network of academies?

**Aga Khan:** Portugal is a very important country ...

I have been to several other places. But Portugal has very important factors: in the Portuguese society, pluralism is a social construction which functions and that is relevant in any society, whether it be industrial or of any other kind. Secondly, there is a political wish to recognise the structures of faith and to give them an appropriate role in society.

The third reason is that Portugal has an extraordinary history and the country understands pluralism. The majority of Portuguese history has been its involvement in pluralism over centuries; in your history there is an acceptance of difference. What we now want to do with Portugal is to reflect over issues, which we want to deal with in the future.

**Antonio Marujo/Faranaz Keshavjee:** And what are they?

**Aga Khan:** One of them is the relation between Europe, or the Western world, with the rest of the Muslim world, to do everything we can to work together and to enable mutual understanding. An institution such as the Academy would bring people together in a pluralistic education, with curricular contents that would not necessarily be part of the standard education in Portugal. Therefore, we work with the International Baccalaureate, to which other contents, which we deem necessary, are added.
We also want to build bridges, from the Portuguese institutions, to build civil society outside of Portugal. We have to look at the decades of governing fragility in Asia and in Africa, and probably elsewhere. One of the most creative forms of corresponding to this frailty is by building a civil society....

**Antonio Marujo/Faranaz Keshavjee:** And can Portugal help?

**Aga Khan:** The majority of developing countries cannot build civil society as rapidly as would be desirable. Therefore, we have to get hold of it from everywhere we can. Portugal has a solid civil society! You are humble with that respect, but you shouldn’t be.

We are very honoured and proud by the fact that the Portuguese government and its institutions want to work with us. We will do everything that is possible to establish this partnership. I believe it may even become a case study for other countries. You are very creative in relation to your perspectives for the future.

**Antonio Marujo/Faranaz Keshavjee:** That is a great responsibility.

**Aga Khan:** You know, that the smaller we are, the greater are our responsibilities. And this is true for the communities; it is true for the countries ...

"Since some time, Portugal has been a country in which the Jamat and its institutions, and the Imamat, have been experimenting with new initiatives to see whether it would be possible in the Western world -- in a strongly Catholic country -- to establish new initiatives which would bring together people of Christian backgrounds and Muslim backgrounds to work together to try to solve some of the issues that are ahead of us. And the agreement that was signed during this visit, concerning collaboration in the diplomatic field, is a very, very important agreement."
"For an institution of faith to enter into a formal, diplomatic relationship is extremely important in the sense that that agreement has to function within the faiths of both communities...."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2008 address at the Jamati Institutional Leaders Luncheon (Lisbon, Portugal)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10301/

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"I speak on behalf of all Ismailis, and on my own behalf, when I say how deeply grateful we are to Portugal and its people, and to you, Mr. President, as well as to the generous donors who made this site available and the launch of this project possible. We express our gratitude not only for your help with the project, but for the open and cooperative way in which this country has always assisted the Ismaili community in its endeavours, promoted its progress, and reinforced and facilitated the realisation of its hopes and its aspirations.

"Few nations have shown so much integrity and sincerity in making transplanted populations feel at home at the very time when they left their homes behind. We thank Portugal for her help, both concrete and moral, for the way in which the Ismaili community, which came for the most part from Mozambique but from other parts of Portuguese-speaking Africa also, and the caring and open-minded welcome that has been given to us. It is our hope that through the quality and design of these buildings to be built here, through their programmes to better this great city for everyone, will stand a tangible and lasting symbol of our friendship and commitment....

"In recognition of the critical problems of human welfare confronting today’s world, and the role faiths can play in contributing to their resolution, Dr. George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Mr. James D Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, convened a Dialogue on 'World Faiths and Development' earlier this year. Leaders of nine world faiths participated: Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Tao. Within each, the major traditions were represented, the Christians by both Catholic and Protestant leaders, the Muslims by leaders of Sunni and Shia communities....
"One goal is to lay the ground-work for co-operation between faith organisations and development organisations including the World Bank. Another, and it is one to which I attach particular importance, is to explore the potential for co-operation between faith organisations in settings where interests are shared and the environment enabling.

"In this connection, I would like to compliment the Government of Portugal on the Law of Religious Freedom currently being discussed in the country. It is a pioneering and forward-looking undertaking that will encourage a new era of religious freedom, respect, and equality for over 60 different religious communities in the country, while maintaining the historic role of the Catholic Church. The draft Law of Religious Freedom can serve as a model for the rest of the European Community, where populations have grown more ethnically and religiously diverse in the past three to four decades.

"In a more immediate sense, I believe that the proposed law will provide a basis for greater co-operation between faith communities in Portugal along the lines envisaged in the World Bank's Interfaith Dialogue. If experience elsewhere is a guide, we can expect the release of much energy and creativity, and the Government and people of Portugal should be assured that the Ismaili Centre of Lisbon, and all those it represents -- the Ismaili community world-wide, and the agencies of the Aga Khan Development Network -- will devote their energies to making Portugal's leadership in this creative and uniquely exciting initiative the success it must be. Social harmony coupled with the freedom and respect of religious expression is a prerequisite for all human progress."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1998 address at the Centro Ismaili, Lisbon, Opening Ceremony (Lisbon, Portugal)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5359/

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"In its contemporary history, when our world, at times, has seemed to descend into chaos, and moral leadership into oblivion, Portugal has been an outstanding example of integrity and compassion. When crises have erupted beyond her shores, she has welcomed displaced populations of different cultures and ethnicities. This is, therefore, an appropriate
occasion to acknowledge the lasting gratitude and permanent commitment of the Ismaili Imamat and Community to Portugal, a land of harmony and opportunity, that rejoices in her diversity as a wellspring of national strength.

"It is a great honour and an immense source of happiness for me to be at this historic Palace of Ajuda to mark a milestone, as our valued relationship moves confidently forward. The Protocol of Co-operation between the Government of the Portuguese Republic and the Ismaili Imamat, which we signed this evening, is the first such Agreement that the Ismaili Imamat has signed with a Western Government, and I am deeply convinced that it will bring clear benefits to our peoples and to many others....

"Portugal is a small country, with a long history, and its role in the world has been illuminated by peaks of glory. The Ismaili Community is a small community with a long history also illuminated by peaks of glory. Our respective histories have also, at times, been marked by conflict and internal challenges. They have often strengthened us. Portugal’s population is only slightly smaller than that of the Ismaili Community worldwide today. We have, therefore, very much in common, which underscores the logic of our new and formal relationship. But there are also differences.

"Portugal is rooted in the centuries old Christian world, whereas the Ismaili Imamat is rooted in the centuries old Muslim world. Portugal’s influence has been essentially in Africa and South America, with an occasional presence in Asia. The Ismaili Community is significantly present in Central and South Asia, the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, but it is nearly totally absent from South America.

"What brings us together is not only our historical similarities and our mutual respect for our past, but our wish to work together better to address the opportunities and the problems which will confront us in the decades ahead. Our respective histories have taught us to place our trust in human values and to root them in an ethical view of life.

"Our histories have taught us the value of dialogue, and that rarely, indeed very rarely, does anything good come out of conflict. Our world view is to engage with the problem of social exclusion in our societies and
to contribute to building bridges across faiths and across nations, by linking diverse parts of the world.

"I have no doubt that for you, whose historical roots are in the Christian world, it is as painful as it is for us Muslims, with our roots in the East, to watch an increasingly deep gulf growing between significant parts of our respective worlds. We cannot stand by as passive observers letting this gulf grow wider and wider, at the cost of future generations. If we have the will, which I am certain we share, we have the historical knowledge and the ethical foundations to move our world forward, to make it a better and more hopeful place, and to put an end to the storm of hatred which appears to be building up around us....

"There are those who say that faiths divide. This may be true. But today we must explore every opportunity to have different faiths come together in addressing the problems of our respective societies. We come from the same common religious heritage, descendants of Abraham, and it is enjoined on us to address the problems of society on the same ethical premises.

"You have created here in Portugal a moral and Enabling Environment for faiths to live in equity and mutual respect. I intend to do all in my power to work with other faiths here and elsewhere, to give practical meaning and quantifiable outcomes to our future partnerships....

"In global terms our numbers may be small, but our openness to addressing the issues of our time and of tomorrow, our willingness to bring mature judgement to our pluralist societies, are so strong, and so vigorously shared, that I believe the partnership we are founding today would enable us, with God's support, to have a positive influence in the future which could far surpass the sizes of our demographies.

"These are the reasons that have given birth to my conviction that this is truly an historic day.

"These are the principles that underpin our long standing and fruitful relationship, inspiring the joint work we already do in Portugal and abroad in Mozambique, Afghanistan and ... Pakistan. It is on these principles and experience that the Protocol of Co-operation builds. Both the Government and the Imamat are determined it does not remain just
an expression of pious hope."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2005 address at the Ismaili Imamat and Government of Portugal ‘Protocol of Co-operation’ Signing Ceremony (Lisbon, Portugal)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7610/

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"Today's occasion is of special happiness since it continues the long-standing relationship that the Ismaili Imamat and community enjoy with the Republic and people of Portugal. Our ties are the stronger for being rooted in a shared sense of responsibility to strive together for the greater good of all.

"The University of Evora is an ancient bastion of this sense of equitable and moral order which supports its tradition of academic excellence, nurturing merit wherever it exists. These are the values which the Iberian Peninsula radiated as an inspiring beacon of light, representing the truly glorious epochs in human history when the Muslim and Judeo-Christian worlds developed constructive linkages, enriching their civilisations and empowering their institutions of higher learning with new sources of knowledge."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2006 Acceptance Address -- Honorary Doctorate, University of Evora (Evora, Portugal)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7654/

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"The Centro’s architectural language will seek authenticity from the Manuoline vocabulary of search and exploration, linking religious inspiration with the nautical imagery which recalls the great voyages of discovery that were launched from this serene harbour, Alis Ubbo, or in its Moorish rendering, Al Usbuna.

"I find myself contemplating whether this serenity will still reign in the Lisbon which will emerge in the twenty-first century. As the city expands, this nation’s economic epicentre will radiate within the European Union
and like its ancient voyages of discovery, Lisbon will continue to strive to link Europe with Africa, Asia and South America.

"I have little doubt, also, that its soul will continue to aspire for spaces of contemplation, for peace, for learning and for sharing. If my own humble role in this search can be to help create such a physical and intellectual space through the Centro Ismaili, I shall feel doubly proud that its beginnings should coincide with the granting to me of the Freedom of the City of Lisbon."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1996 Acceptance Address -- Key of the City of Lisbon Presentation Ceremony (Lisbon, Portugal)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/5213/

"Portugal has an extraordinary history. It has been influencing the world for centuries. Your influence today is not limited to Europe. Your influence is massive through your presence in South America. A country like Brazil is a case study for many countries around the world. Brazil is dealing with new areas of knowledge in air transport -- that is a new area of knowledge -- competing with the best in the world in areas such as agriculture, the development of cash crops, and sugar at new levels of technology.

"So the influence of Portugal and the capacity of Portugal to influence what is happening around the world is immense. And it is in this context that I want to thank you for electing me a member of the Academy and for the opportunity you have given me to encourage you to use your global influence, through your history, through your knowledge, through your contacts with the developing world, to bring to the rest of the world what is best in your knowledge."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2009 Acceptance Address -- Investiture as a Foreign Member, Class of Humanities, Academy of Sciences of Lisbon (Lisbon, Portugal)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9244/
"Returning to Portugal is always a great pleasure for me. The Ismaili Imamat and the Aga Khan Development Network have had a close, long-standing relationship with the Portuguese government and the Portuguese people, a relationship built on shared values....

"Our ceremony tonight is only the second one we have held in predominantly Christian countries. I mention this point because it speaks to an essential dimension of the Award. While its roots lie deep in our concern for the state of Islamic architecture, the Award is also committed to a spirit of pluralism and a respect for diversity, a set of values which are deeply embedded in Portuguese history.

"It was on the Iberian Peninsula, of course, that one of history's great pluralistic societies flourished for several centuries, a home for Christian and Jewish peoples that was also part of an Islamic empire. Portugal has for many ages nourished a profound sense of what we might call 'world awareness'....

"The story of Portugal is in part the story of people who came from far away to settle in this beautiful land. And it is also the story of people who have gone out from Portugal to shape the heritage of places in every corner of the globe, from Eastern and Southern Asia, to the Persian Gulf, from Eastern and Western Africa to South America. And, even as I say these words, I remember the sense of overpowering beauty I felt when I first walked through the streets of Manaos in Brazil...."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2013 Aga Khan Award for Architecture Prize Ceremony address (Lisbon, Portugal)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10603/

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