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Aga Khan: Universities Essential to Civil Society.

Toronto, June 18, 2004: “Partnerships between the developed and developing world can and do work. Moreover, they demonstrate how essential universities and their lifeblood – you their graduates – are to civil society.” Civil society, meritocracy and pluralism are the bases for true democracy said the Aga Khan to the graduating class of University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education [OISE].

The Aga Khan, who gave the keynote speech at the Governor General's Leadership Conference last month in Ottawa, received a degree of Doctor of Laws, *Honoris Causa*, from U of T. In his Ottawa speech, he shared his vision for slowly cultivating democracy across the world, partly through the help of Canadian expertise.



“Madam Chancellor, on behalf of the Governing Council, I ask you to confer the degree of Doctor of Laws, *Honoris Causa* on His Highness the Aga Khan for his service to humanity, as an intellectual visionary, an imaginative and impassioned benefactor, and a true man of faith.”

University of Toronto Graduation Ceremony – Standing on the left, The Aga Khan.
At the podium, reading the Citation, President Bigerneau. [© Heritage Photo]

In Toronto, in his Citation, President Robert Bigerneau explained the reasons for the special recognition: “Over five decades, the Aga Khan has demonstrated a profound personal commitment towards improving the quality of life of some of the most disadvantaged populations on this planet,” he said. He further recognised the contribution of the Aga Khan’s organizations, such as the AKDN, in promoting health, Education, and Development projects in Asia and Africa, including the operation of some 300 schools and 200 healthcare institutions.

The Aga Khan practises what he preaches. With 15 millions followers spread out in 30 countries from Australia to Zanzibar, he can afford to draw from a large pool of qualified people to realise his vision of a peaceful and intellectual Islam which helps the world to become a better place.

Accompanying the Aga Khan at the Convocation, was Firoz Rasul has recently stepped down as CEO of Ballard Corporation to take over soon a challenging position within one of the Aga Khan organizations.

Outside of the Convocation hall, many Ismailis gathered to salute their spiritual leader. Some had flowers in their hands. Some came from as far as Los Angeles and Vancouver to see him. He came out and smiled, visibly happy to see them. Today he waves at his community in Toronto. Next week, he will attend a ceremony at which President Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique will lay the first stone in the construction of an Aga Khan Academy in the southern city of Matol, the second in an international network of 20 such academies. A different place, a different time... there is no end to the Aga Khan’s work.