

Press release: UK welcomes His Highness the Aga Khan for the opening of new academic centre in London

Foreign Office Minister for Human Rights Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon attended the official opening of the new Aga Khan Centre in King's Cross today (26 June) as part of the Diamond Jubilee tour of His Highness the Aga Khan.

The centre is a positive symbol of diversity, cross-cultural learning and shows Britain as a multicultural, multi-faith and tolerant nation.

The new development will be home to institutions and agencies including those of the non-profit Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), a group of international agencies dedicated to improving the quality of life in the poorest countries of the world.

The UK Government works closely with the AKDN in Central Asia and Tanzania, as well as in Afghanistan where the Aga Khan Foundation implement Department for International Development (DfID) programmes including delivering an education programme under the Girls' Education Challenge.

Speaking at the opening, Lord Tariq Ahmad said:

The opening of this spectacular new building in London is a concrete example of the privileged relationship the UK enjoys with the Aga Khan and the Ismaili community and is the ideal way to mark the Diamond Jubilee tour of His Highness the Aga Khan.

The work we do together makes a huge difference to people's lives, not least in Afghanistan where 300,000 more girls are going to school thanks to our girls' education programme there.

One of the Foreign Secretary's key priorities is ensuring the world's poorest girls receive 12 years of quality education. Appallingly, 90% of world's poorest children leave school unable to read and write. That's why we've committed £500 million of UKaid to help over 1.5 million vulnerable girls to learn.

Also in attendance for the official opening were His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and the Mayor of London.

The new centre in King's Cross, designed by Pritzker Prize-winning Japanese architect Fumihiko Maki includes gardens, terraces and courtyards inspired by different Muslim civilisations, although the centre will serve as an academic centre only and will not have a religious function. It brings together under one roof the

Aga Khan Foundation (UK), Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) and Aga Khan University's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (AKU-ISMC).

Tomorrow His Highness will be attending a lunch at Lancaster House in his honour hosted by the International Development Secretary, Penny Mordaunt, with Foreign Office Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir Simon McDonald, attending.

Notes to editors:

- The Aga Khan is celebrating 60 years as Imam of Shia Ismaili Muslims during 2017-18 by conducting official visits to countries where there are significant Ismaili communities including the UK, USA, Canada, Uganda, Tanzania, India, Pakistan and UAE.
- The UK office of the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) was established in 1973 to support the broader AKDN by forming strategic partnerships with UK and European institutional partners including government agencies, policy institutes, corporations, foundations, NGOs, universities, associations and professional networks.
- The Aga Khan University (AKU) is an autonomous, not-for-profit university that promotes human welfare through research, teaching and community service. It operates in Pakistan, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Afghanistan and the UK. The AKU's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (ISMC) was established in 2002 and provides research and teaching on the heritage of Muslim societies including in contemporary environments, with a Master's programme in Muslim Cultures. The institute is listed with UKVI as an Overseas Provider as the degree is an AKU degree under its Pakistani charter. The AKU works with scholars abroad and in the UK including at Oxford, Cambridge and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).
- The Institute for Ismaili Studies (IIS) was established in 1977 to promote scholarship and learning of Muslim cultures and societies, historical and contemporary, and encourage a better understanding of their relationship with other societies and faiths. IIS collaborates with universities around the world and has two graduate programmes: Islamic Studies and Humanities and a joint double-Master's Degree Programme in partnership with University College London's Institute for Education.