

Senhor Presidente da República, Excelência

Your Highness Prince Aga Khan

Senhor Vice-Presidente da Assembleia da República

Senhor Presidente do Conselho Geral da NOVA

Membros do Governo

Senhores Deputados

Senhores Antigos Reitores da Universidade Nova de Lisboa

Senhores Membros da Equipa Reitoral

Ilustre Padrinho, Dr. Francisco Pinto Balsemão

Corpo Diplomático

Membros da Academia

Minhas Senhoras e Meus Senhores

It is a great privilege to pay tribute to His Highness Shah Karim al-Hussaini, Prince Aga Khan. I would like to thank our Rector for this opportunity – and also for his extraordinary contribution to the development of our dear Nova University, over the last decade.

This is a very special Honoris Causa Doctorate. By awarding the title to His Highness, Nova is not only recognizing his life and work, it is also welcoming the Ismaili Imam and the Ismaili community of **15 million** people to our neighborhood, to our city and to our country. Although separated by **1400** years of history and geography, our city and the Imam have for centuries shared very deep values of tolerance, respect for individuality, intercultural dialogue and solidarity among humans – this is the best side of our species and the basis of what brings us together.

Your Highness, we are proud to count you and your community among our neighbors! As an international university committed to bringing together students, academics and professionals from so many different countries, we remain devoted to the Portuguese tradition of bringing the world and its different peoples closer.

During the course of history, the Ismailis have, under the guidance of their Imams, made significant contributions to the cultural, intellectual and religious life of Muslims and the wider human society. The University of al-Azhar and the Academy of Science, Dar al-Ilm, in Egypt and indeed the city of Cairo itself, are testimony to this contribution. Among the names that flourished under the protection of the Ismaili Imams may be noted the sage Persian Nasir Khusraw, the jurist Qadi an-Numan, the philosopher Kermani, and the father of optics Ibn Haytham.

His Highness Shah Karim al-Hussaini, Prince Aga Khan is the 49th hereditary Imam of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims. He was born on December 13, 1936 in Geneva and spent his early childhood in Nairobi, Kenya. He attended Le Rosey School in Switzerland for nine years and graduated from Harvard in 1959 with a BA with Honours in Islamic History. He succeeded his grandfather Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah Aga Khan on July 11, 1957 at the age of 20.

Prince Aga Khan, like his grandfather before him, has been concerned with the impact of the challenges of the rapidly evolving world on his Imamate and on the world. Speaking at the International Conference on the Example (Seerat) of the Prophet Muhammad in 1976, he noted that the wisdom of Allah's final Prophet in seeking new solutions for problems which could not be solved by traditional methods, provides the inspiration for Muslims to conceive a truly modern and dynamic society, without affecting the fundamental concepts of Islam.

The organization of the Imamate around the world as a network of supportive and generous communities characterised by an ethos of self-reliance, an emphasis on education and a pervasive spirit of philanthropy, have also been a concern of His Highness. He has encouraged Ismaili Muslims, settled in the industrialised world, to contribute towards the progress of their communities through various development programmes. The selfless dedication to their communities has been a key element for the resilience of the Imamate, even in very challenging times, including the resettlement of those persecuted under the reign of terror of Idi Amin in Uganda.

The dedication to education and philanthropy which are in line with the mandate and responsibility of the Ismaili Imamate throughout history has been endorsed mightily by His Highness. He has remained committed to the initiatives of His grandfather in India and Pakistan, including institutions such as the Diamond Jubilee Investment Trust and the Platinum Jubilee Investments. Diamond Jubilee Schools for girls were set up throughout the remote Northern Areas of Pakistan and scholarship programmes were established to give assistance to needy students. In East Africa, and major social welfare institutions were created, including the Aga Khan Hospital in Nairobi.

In the early 1980's many new social and economic development projects were launched. These range from the establishment of the international Aga Khan University with its Faculty of Health Sciences and teaching hospital based in Karachi, and the creation of a girls school and a medical centre in the Hunza region, in Northern Pakistan, to the establishment of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in Gujarat, India, and the extension of existing urban hospitals and primary health care centres in Tanzania and Kenya, in East Africa.

Today, several initiatives form part of an international network of institutions involved in fields that range from education, health and rural development, to architecture and the promotion of private sector enterprise, known as the Aga Khan Development Network, the AKDN. Some of its programs work closely with top institutions around the world, including the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The Network also includes the Aga

Khan Health Services and the Aga Khan Education Services, providers of health care, schooling and other educational services in South Asia and East Africa since the beginning of the twentieth century. **These institutions are open to all, regardless of origin or creed.**

The activity of the AKDN testifies to a visionary and prescient belief of His Highness of the role that civil society must play in addressing the challenges of our present and our future, according to 3 central principles

(i) a convergence with all other societal actors, like governments or international institutions, in an inclusive approach that leverages the talents and capabilities of all,

(ii) a close engagement with the people whose lives we hope to transform and their real needs and

(iii) a search for innovative, effective and practical solutions for real problems.

This is the kind of vision and approach that will move us forward and that we should try develop everyday with our students.

One brilliant example of this approach emerged in 2002, when the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED), in partnership with the Government of Tajikistan and the International Finance Corporation, formed PamirEnergy. The company assumed the operational management of all power generation, transmission and distribution facilities for a 25-year concession period. To address cost issues, AKFED developed a pioneering subsidy scheme, making electricity affordable to residents and financially viable for PamirEnergy. The subsidies ensure an average tariff of 3.25 US cents/kWh, with innovative customer support schemes and technology to ensure affordable access for the poorest households. Subsidies are funded generously by two grants, one by the Swiss Government (SECO) and the other by the Government of Tajikistan through financing by the International Development Association, a member of the World Bank Group. Since then, the company has repaired the electrical infrastructure of GBAO, expanded hydroelectric capacity and transmitted surplus energy from Tajikistan to Afghanistan.

On 11 July, 2017, only a few days ago, His Highness the Aga Khan has marked his Diamond Jubilee, starting a year of celebration of 60 years of a global commitment to partnerships based on the principles of ethics in action, peace and pluralism for the benefit of his community of Shia Ismaili Muslims and for human beings around the world. **Congratulations Your Highness!** For over six decades, His Highness has remained truthful to a millennial history that has been able to merge tradition and modernity to find new solutions to the challenges of the day, that has stressed communal self-reliance in a true spirit of generosity and mutual support and that has remained committed to philanthropic engagement with people from all religions and races. I would like to stress the absolute and unwavering dedication to higher education as the engine of development. In doing, so His Highness has remained truthful to the best heritage of Islam and to the best forces of the human spirit.

Nova University of Lisbon has, through its short, but fruitful history, shared the same commitment to these forces and wants to be an ever more powerful beacon of the intercultural dialogue that will usher in a new renaissance for the coming years – a **2020 Renaissance**. Today, we bring together students from all over the world to create educational programs, in a true spirit of mutual support and harmony among cultures, races and religions. We are sure they will do ever greater things as a University.

At Nova, we fundamentally believe in the fraternity of the human spirit and the value of the diversity it engenders. That the commerce, the conviviality and the cooperation between the nations and the people of the world feeds growth, progress and well-being. We have leveraged globalization, embarking on the attraction of foreign students and faculty and creating on our campus an open and diverse space of dialogue and debate, because we know that it is here that we can help create a better world.

The promotion of dialogue in the world is, moreover, a Portuguese tradition begun more than five centuries ago, of which we are proud and that we want to promote. We are more Portuguese because we create bridges in the world teaching students from everywhere!

We believe that our city and our country should be a reference for global dialogue. This has been our history and we should take pride and leverage it. When we see the export momentum of our companies, the arrival of tourists and investors to Portugal, the arrival of new immigrants from all over the world, we must not only take advantage of that to strengthen our economic growth, but also to create in Portugal a true space of global openness, which contributes to new solutions and mutual understandings.

His Highness carries the historical commitment and mandate of the Imam, Nova continues a tradition of more than 500 years in which our city has been a centre stage for the mixing of the cultures and the races of the world. That is why I believe that the Imam will find in Lisbon a uniquely welcoming and safe place to build their home. Joined by the values shared in our history and the space shared in our future, we are now neighbours that can create a partnership that celebrates openness, diversity and worldliness, the value that have made difference in history!

And never, like now, has such heritage and worldview been so paramount for the future, not just of Muslims and of our community in Lisbon or Portugal, but of the entire humankind. We live in troubling times that require more from people like us, and the closer we work, the more we will be able to achieve!

I would like to invite Nova and the Imam to continue pursuing these noble values and to seek dialogue and action in our world in a partnership that contributes to usher in the 2020 Renaissance I mentioned before. And I would like to take the final segment to explain why I believe that such partnerships are so critical at the current juncture of our history.

The fundamental goal of each generation is to stand on the shoulders of previous generations to contribute to:

- **a continuously sustainable planet,**
- **an increasingly harmonious human society and**
- **an ever more developed body of knowledge and technology.**

The legacy of each generation, its leaders and its peoples, directs the arrow that defines our species and is judged afterwards by our common human History. (?) Will our generation be associated with those who have produced times of oppression, poverty, intellectual darkness, and wars? Or with those who have created eras of peace, freedom, scientific discovery, and economic progress? Each of us should reflect on how our choices and actions will contribute to that legacy.

The previous generation has dramatically improved the position of mankind. We truly stand in the shoulders of giants! In recent decades we have managed to control hunger, disease and war.

Tremendous progress at the speed of light.

Today, our generation is at a critical junction in defining our legacy – **inequality, insecurity, intolerance** are on the rise – **hope, openness, compromise** are diminishing. The world faces challenges that are **very real** and require **equally real** solutions: migrations, inequality, political instability, terrorism, religious intolerance, loss of privacy, crisis in European institutions, etc ..., etc ..., etc ...

In a recent speech, HH has acknowledged these very challenges – **and I quote** –

“The growing challenge to pluralistic values does not happen only when people move physically from one place to another. As new technologies shrink the planet, distant forces become dire threats. We worry about the perils of environmental degradation, for example, including the spectre of climate change. We see how every local economy can be affected by distant economies. We realize how dangerous forces can spread across national borders - deadly diseases, or deadly weaponry, criminal networks or terrorist threats. And often, the human impulse is not to work across borders to meet these dangers, but to withdraw from a threatening world. Such fears may be culturally based, or economically driven, or psychologically rooted. But they should not be underestimated. And they will not be driven away by nice sounding words proclaiming lofty ideals.” – end quote.

We truly face tremendous challenges as a global species.

As His Highness highlight, in these times of difficulty and uncertainty, **our most primitive human instincts are not always useful:**

- **we tend to close ourselves instead of opening up,**
- **to give in to paranoia instead of building trust,**
- **to focus on our differences instead of our similarities.**

We risk abandoning the great adventure of a unified project of Humanity to find refuge among our tribes; To find comfort in **conflict, bigotry and narrow-mindedness** that have always taken humankind in the wrong path of history.

It has been this way since the beginning of time. The Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh tells us of a murderous flood that wipes out human beings lost in hopelessness and moral degradation, salvaging only the few righteous. The god Ea warned Utnapishtim and instructed him to build an enormous boat to save himself, his family, and "the seed of all living things." When the rains subsided, the boat landed on a mountain, and Utnapishtim set free first a dove, then a swallow, and finally a raven, which found land. The god Ishtar, created the rainbow and placed it in the sky, as a reminder to the gods and a pledge to mankind that there would be no more floods. .After more than 5,000 years, we know that the same failings keep coming back and threatening –fortunately only temporarily – all the beautiful accomplishments of our species.

History – **and we must listen to history above all sciences to understand human beings** – history shows us that floods are useless and unnecessary. That the transformation of human societies through real solutions obtained through **openness, tolerance and innovation** are always the best tools to set a new path. We need **trust, openness, mutual understanding and compassion** instead of other more shadowy forces. We need solutions – real and practical solutions – that help create a **more equitable, open and fairer** society; a world that fills souls with purpose and hope.

We are at a point when those who believe in the absolute universality of the human project should mark their presence, show their courage and work together! As I have mentioned before, now more than ever, those forces are in dire need to preserve the positive sense of the arrow of human development, and avert the darker shadows of our beings.

Over one year ago, the Rector and I welcomed His Highness in a visit to the Palacete Henrique Mendonça. We were accompanied by Mr Nazim Ahmad, the diplomatic representative of the Ismaili Imamat to the Portuguese Republic. Today, the Palacete, which has been an integral part of the history of our city and of our University is undergoing renovation to become the Seat of the Ismaili Imamat. We could not be prouder or happier to know that the memories of our University that fill the walls of the Palacete will find a new caretaker so committed to the same ideals of the responsibility of Civil Society to act creatively and decisively to improve the lives of those less fortunate and bring together the world's peoples, breaking boundaries across geography, race and religions.

During that visit and in the negotiations that followed, we discovered kindred spirits and trust was forged. The Imamat's commitment to higher education and Nova's unwavering commitment to diversity, openness and tolerance are the underpinnings of this dialogue and partnership. A partnership that makes Lisbon a centre for Ismaili Imamat and the Ismaili Community, but also for all those around

the world that strive for a new renaissance. **A partnership that takes a stand in the quest for solutions to global problems.**

I trust, Your Highness, that you will find in our University and in the peoples of our great city and our great country true partners in your quest to make a difference around the world. A difference that will be stronger in partnerships forged among old friends that are now new neighbours. **That is the difference we all must strive to make and that the world and history expects from us!**

Inch' allah...