

**The 2009 Lisbon Forum, 13-14 November,
Lisbon Ismaili Centre**

**North –South Centre of the Council of Europe, in partnership
with the Alliance of Civilizations and the Aga Khan
Development Network (AKDN)**

**Welcome Remarks by the AKDN Representative,
Comendador Nazim Ahmad**

Mr. Jorge Sampaio, President of the Lisbon Forum and Special
Representative of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

Mr. António Costa, Mayor of Lisbon

Mr. Miguel Angel Martínez, Vice-President of the European
Parliament

Mrs. Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the
Council of Europe

Professor Adriano Moreira, Chairman of the Portuguese
Government's Delegation to the Aga Khan Development
Network Portuguese Coordination Committee

Mr. Amirali Bhanji, President of the Muslim Ismaili Community
in Portugal

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Aga Khan Development Network, I would like to express our warm welcome to all the participants to the 2009 Lisbon Forum and to convey our great pleasure in, once more, hosting this international forum, in collaboration with the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe and the Alliance of Civilizations.

This is now the sixth international gathering led by the North-South Centre that we have jointly hosted here at this Lisbon Ismaili Centre since 2007.

Today, at the outset of the Forum, I wish to reiterate to the North-South Centre our deep commitment to further expand and consolidate our joint work, under the scope of the Protocol of Cooperation which was signed between the Portuguese Government and the Ismaili Imamat in 2005.

Let me share with you some considerations regarding the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) and its work in the field of education for human rights, global citizenship and pluralism.

His Highness the Aga Khan, forty-ninth hereditary Imam or spiritual leader of the Shia Ismaili Muslims and a direct descendant of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), is the founder and the chairman of the Aga Khan Development Network, a group of development agencies that conduct their programmes without regard to faith, origin or gender of the beneficiaries in more than 30 countries.

Our agencies have mandates that include the environment, health, education, architecture, culture, microfinance, rural development, disaster reduction, the promotion of private-sector enterprise and the revitalisation of historic cities.

AKDN includes two universities, the Aga Khan University and the University of Central Asia, as well more than 300 schools and advanced educational programmes that provide quality pre-school, primary, secondary, and higher secondary education services to students in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Tajikistan.

As areas that contribute directly to forming a culture of human rights, global citizenship and pluralism have been at the core of AKDN's endeavours, and I could give you some examples, such as:

- the work being developed by the Institute of Educational Development of the Aga Khan University in the field of civic school education and global citizenship in Pakistan and East Africa;
- the establishment of the Aga Khan Academies, an integrated network of residential schools in Africa, South and Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe, including one future Academy in Lisbon, dedicated to expanding access to education of an international standard of excellence.

The Academies are centered on the International Baccalaureate Curriculum and give due emphasis to the subjects of global and civic citizenship, pluralism and intercultural understanding, all pre-requisites to a culture of human rights;

- I would also like to highlight the founding by His Highness the Aga Khan of the Global Centre for Pluralism in Ottawa in Canada, as a non-denominational, not-for-profit, Canadian organization with global reach.

The Centre will undertake research, deliver programs, facilitate dialogue, develop pedagogical materials and work with partners worldwide to build the capacity of individuals, groups, educational institutions and governments to promote indigenous approaches to pluralism in their own countries and communities. Under the scope of the Protocol with the Portuguese Government, a future delegation of the Global Centre for Pluralism is planned to open in Lisbon.

- And finally, it gives me great pleasure to also give the example of the public Early Childhood Education Centre in the Lisbon area of Olivais, which management and operations the Aga Khan Foundation Portugal has recently taken over, following an invitation made by the Institute of Social Solidarity. In this Centre, new pedagogic approaches are being followed with children from 0 to 5 years of age, in order to instill in them the values of appreciation and celebration of diversity and pluralism, from the early stages in their lives.

Twenty years after the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we saw the establishment of the an international education organization sponsored by UNESCO with deep roots in the human rights matrix, notably, the International Baccalaureate, with whom AKDN works in close partnership.

Alec Peterson, one of its founders, had pointed out that we have not inherited this world from our parents, but borrowed it from our children, and that unless the next generation of the young are brought up as global citizens and builders of pluralistic societies, we are all failing our responsibility to our children.

At the beginning of this new millennium, this message remains an urgent call to action by all of us. I therefore salute the North South Centre and the Alliance of Civilizations for this timely Forum and wish all the participants fruitful working sessions, inspired by the architecture of this Ismaili Centre, itself a tribute to diversity and humanism.

Thank you.