

## **Speech by President Firoz Rasul at the 2015 AKU Convocation in Dar es Salaam**

24 February 2015

The Chancellor, His Highness the Aga Khan  
Trustees of the University  
Honourable Ministers of the Government of Tanzania  
Members of the Diplomatic Corps  
Deans, Faculty and Staff of the University  
Parents, Donors, Supporters and Distinguished Guests  
And most importantly, Graduates  
Humjambo and Karibuni

Welcome to the 2015 Convocation Ceremony of the Aga Khan University.

Let me begin by congratulating our graduates. You have reached your goal today! I recently heard that some of our alumni used to call AKU “the house of rigour.” It is definitely the case that no one earns an AKU degree without a lot of hard work.

Today we are celebrating not only the graduation of the class of 2015, but also AKU’s 15th year in East Africa. Over the past 15 years, we have a great many people and organisations to thank for our success. And let me begin by expressing our profound gratitude to the founder and Chancellor of this University, His Highness the Aga Khan for having the vision and putting the pressure on the University to start in East Africa 15 years ago. Thank you, Your Highness.

I would also like to express our gratitude to our Chancellor for consenting to preside over today’s convocation ceremony, which is the very first time in East Africa where we have these convocation ceremonies. It is a momentous day for the University, for the graduates, for the faculty, and for which we are very grateful. Thank you.

We are grateful to all our financial supporters: individuals and alumni; foundations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as well as Lundin Foundation and corporations, such as Johnson and Johnson; governmental and development agencies, such as the BMZ and KfW from Germany, AFD from France and DFATD from Canada. We are indebted to numerous people and institutions that have aided us as partners, advisors and volunteers. These include the University of Alberta and the University of California, San Francisco. And we must single out for special thanks the Government of Tanzania, which from the beginning has recognised the important contribution this University makes to the nation’s development and granting the University a charter to operate in Tanzania.

I know our graduates will join me in thanking their families for their support and encouragement, through all the late nights of studying and long months away from home. And I know they will wish to acknowledge the dedication of their professors. We are truly fortunate to have a faculty whose expertise is matched by its passion for teaching.

It seems to me that in addition to congratulating the men and women we are here to celebrate today, we ought to thank our graduates. In the end, a university is measured by its graduates and their contributions to society. I have no doubt that our pride in you will only grow as we learn of your achievements in the years to come.

Yet the world in which you make your way is not a simple one. For some time, we have been hearing and saying that our planet is getting more connected and more complex than ever before – a place knit together by instant communications and global trade. This is a truism that is no less true for being so familiar.

Even so, it seems we have yet to adapt to this fundamental fact. Recent years furnish numerous examples of global interconnection enabling events to race ahead of our capacity to understand or respond to them. The 2008 financial crisis that struck the world's most advanced economies. The public uprisings demanding change in the Arab world. The spread of Ebola in West Africa.

It is tempting when faced with such a world to think in terms of containment, or even isolation. But a “borderless” world does not just enable crises to spread. It also allows for the free circulation of good ideas, new perspectives and innovations that enhance our lives. How do you build a strong health care system that not only treats but also prevents disease? How can we improve the quality of education so that all children, regardless of where they live or their socioeconomic background, are prepared for success later in life? How can governments foster development? We know more about the answers to such questions than ever before. And thanks to the free flow of information, those answers are more widely available than they have ever been.

A “borderless” world also connects people to people. It opens up the possibility of real dialogue between individuals, communities, countries and civilisations that have mainly known one another through hearsay. As our Chancellor His Highness the Aga Khan has said and I quote, “if we are to become full participants in the knowledge society of the 21st century, we must “embrace the values of collaboration and coordination, openness and partnership, choice and diversity.” Because, in his words, “The spirit of the knowledge society is the spirit of pluralism – a readiness to accept the other...to see difference as an opportunity rather than a threat.” Thus, a “borderless” world offers both unprecedented challenges and extraordinary opportunities. The Aga Khan University's mission is to educate the leaders East Africa needs in this era.

It is fitting that 2015 marks not only our 15th year in East Africa, but also the 15th anniversary of the reestablishment of the East African Community. As a University, we have reflected long and hard on how we can contribute to East Africa's development in a period of regional and global integration. We have concluded that we must expand well beyond our current outlines in order to develop versatile, agile and innovative leaders in a wide variety of fields.

How do we plan to do this? In Arusha, the headquarters of the East African Community, we will offer undergraduates a liberal arts education at our Faculty of Arts and Sciences, as well opportunities for graduate professional education in fields including Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism, Architecture and Human Settlement. In Dar es Salaam, we are building a new campus for our Institute for Educational Development to further its mission of educating outstanding teachers and school administrators. Nairobi is home to our health sciences programmes and our Graduate School of Media and Communications, which will train journalists and media leaders. Our Graduate School of Leadership and Management will also develop managers and leaders in the private, public and social sectors. A new Aga Khan University Hospital in Kampala will expand our reach to provide quality healthcare and train health professionals in Uganda. In addition, we will strengthen our existing health services in

the region as well as continuing and professional education programmes in Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, while also adding services in Rwanda and Burundi.

Together, these projects represent an extraordinary investment of over the next 15 years of over \$1 billion of which over \$700 million will be in Tanzania alone. This is an extraordinary vote of confidence in the region's future. Each of our campuses will serve students from across East Africa. They will be crossroads: places that bring the region's people together to learn from the best in the world, and to learn from each other. They will foster mutual understanding, a spirit of shared purpose and a sense of common identity.

Ours is a time in which opportunities for innovation abound along the intersections where different disciplines and professions meet. For example, we want to see educators and health professionals working together to prevent illness. We want to see business, government and civil society leaders building frameworks to protect the environment while promoting economic growth. We would like to see journalists and technology entrepreneurs connecting rural audiences to essential information. We want to create an environment in which conversations between biologists and sociologists, ecologists and philosophers, economists and anthropologists open up new perspectives on our world. Our aim is to produce graduates who are not only ready for demanding jobs, but who will have the skills and drive to act as entrepreneurs to create new jobs themselves.

Graduants, you can contribute to the realisation of this audacious ambition of your university by sharing your knowledge and your ideas, by proposing solutions, offering encouragement and advice, raising awareness and most of all demonstrating the values and principles of AKU.

So stay connected with your classmates, with your teachers and your fellow alumni. Be generous with your knowledge and your time, and imagine how you can collaborate to bring about the necessary change.

You are part of a remarkable community, the community of Aga Khan University. Our journeys are linked – yours, the alumni's and the University's. If we all act on the basis of that understanding, I believe our shared future will be very bright indeed.

Once again, I commend you for your determination and congratulate you on your achievements. May the journey you begin today be all that you have dreamed of.

Thank you. Asante Sana

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