President Macron awards Aga Khan France’s highest honour, the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour

Paris, France, 20 September 2018 - President Emmanuel Macron yesterday awarded His Highness the Aga Khan, the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour (La Grand-croix de la Légion d’honneur), in recognition of his contribution to humanity and achievements in improving the quality of life of the most vulnerable populations around the world.

The country’s highest national medal of honour was bestowed upon the Aga Khan at a ceremony at le Quai d’Orsay by France’s Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian in commemoration of the Aga Khan’s Diamond Jubilee, commemorating 60 years as Imam (spiritual leader) of the world’s Shia Ismaili Muslim community.

Minister Le Drian congratulated His Highness on his 60 years of commitment and dedication towards the cause of peace, pluralism and development. “You are Sir, a man true to your commitments, a man of his word and a man of peace. And for all that you have accomplished in your life for our country, and for the stability of the world, France wishes tonight to warmly express its gratitude by elevating you to the dignity of the Grand Cross in the order of the Legion of Honour. Sir, on behalf of the President of the Republic, and by virtue of the powers conferred upon me, we bestow you the dignity of the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour.”

The event was part of a two-day visit in honour of the Aga Khan’s life’s work. On 18th September, President Macron received the Aga Khan at the Élysée Palace - the official office and residence of the President of France - where the two leaders discussed development initiatives in parts of the world where the Imamat and France collaborate as well as regional issues of importance.

In expressing his deep gratitude for the honour bestowed upon him, the Aga Khan spoke about the importance he placed on a partnership he felt was built on shared values. “For years, we have worked together in different fields, in France, abroad and always in a close partnership, of common points of view, of common objectives and, above all, respect for all the great values of France. For me this partnership is particularly important. It is a partnership built on historical values. And these historical values have proven themselves around the world. These are values of French origin, but which today are universal values,” he said.

The award ceremony was followed by a dinner hosted by the French government in honour of the Aga Khan, and attended by government officials and leading members of French social, economic and cultural civil society organisations. Members of His Highness’ family – his brother Prince Amyn, his son Prince Rahim and his daughter Princess Zahra – were also in

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attendance together with senior leaders from the Aga Khan Development Network and the Ismaili community.

French Minister Le Drian and the Aga Khan also had a bilateral discussion on further strengthening the partnership between the Government of France and the Ismaili Imamat, notably through the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), a network of agencies committed to improving the quality of life of the most vulnerable people through economic, social and cultural development activities globally.

The occasion also marked the tenth anniversary of the 2008 cooperation agreement between the AKDN and the French Government recognising their common vision for development – the necessity of long-term engagement, the participation in development of local communities and the importance of integrating economic development with social development.

Initiatives led by the AKDN in collaboration with Agence Française de Développement (AFD), France’s development agency, and other French agencies in the areas of health, education, infrastructure and rural development have made a significant impact on the quality of life of the most vulnerable people in Africa and Asia. Examples of this collaboration include the Heart and Cancer Centre at the Aga Khan University Hospital in Nairobi, Kenya; support to the French Medical Institute for Mothers and Children (FMIC) in Kabul, Afghanistan; support for health services in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; the Bujagali Hydropower plant, which today provides almost half of Uganda’s electricity; and the establishment of Roshan, the first, and largest, mobile telephone provider in Afghanistan.

The Aga Khan’s contributions to the preservation of French heritage were also recognised. He is Founder and President of the Fondation pour la sauvegarde et le développement du Domaine de Chantilly which has made a significant contribution to the conservation and restoration of the domain, including the Château of Chantilly.

The Grand-croix de la Légion d’honneur is the highest French Medal of Honour and was established in 1802 by Napoleon Bonaparte. Previous recipients include Prince Charles, Emperor Akihito (Japan), King Willem-Alexander (Netherlands), Václav Havel (Czech Republic), King Hussein (Jordan) as well as French Presidents and former Prime Ministers.

Media resources:

Photographs (Download)
Broadcast video for media available upon request
His Highness the Aga Khan's biography (Download)
Brief: 60 years of improving the Quality of Life

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His Highness the Aga Khan is the 49th hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, and founder and Chairman of the AKDN, a network of private development agencies working in 30 countries. He completed his Diamond Jubilee earlier this year—marking 60 years as Imam of the global Shia Ismaili Muslim community. The year-long celebration which ended in July, was commemorated by official visits at the invitations of governments across the world, as well as the launch of a number of global initiatives to create knowledge and share best practices in development work, strengthen civil society institutions, increase capacity and dedicate additional resources to alleviate poverty. The Imamat is the institution or office of the Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims.

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is working to improve the quality of life for tens of millions of people around the world. Amongst the 1,000 or so AKDN programmes and institutions that operate in 30 countries, primarily in the developing world, many date back over 60 years, and some over 100. The Network employs over 80,000 people. Its budget for non-profit social and cultural activities is approximately US$ 950 million. The Network’s economic development arm, the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development, generates annual revenues of US$ 4.3 billion, and all surpluses generated by its project companies are reinvested in further development activities, usually in fragile, remote or post-conflict regions. For more information, please visit www.akdn.org.