

**Message from His Highness the Aga Khan
on the occasion of the Kusi Ideas Festival
Kigali, Rwanda, 8 December 2019**

Delivered on behalf of His Highness the Aga Khan by Dr Azim Lakhani, AKDN Diplomatic Representative for Kenya

The story of Africa's journey is inspirational. We see around us every day compelling evidence that Africa is today a continent of opportunity, of hope, and of confidence.

Africa's strength has always been her peoples. Their resilience, sense of community and self-help, ingenuity and resourcefulness in innovating fresh solutions - often in the most difficult circumstances - is responsible for the continent's progress and exciting prospects.

The fastest growing economies in the world are in Africa - many of them projected to grow above 5 percent per year. Here, there is also a growing youth population - an impressive 60 percent of Africa's population is under the age of 25 - a significantly higher proportion than in the West. The continent is also poised to provide a new market for goods and services at a time when the population in the West is diminishing. Imagine the opportunities for employment and investment in Africa!

My early childhood was in Kenya in the 1940's. From the time I became the 49th hereditary Imam of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims in 1957, an integral part of my daily life and work has encompassed seeking to improve living conditions and opportunities in African countries.

Today, all of us engaged in Africa are witnessing a palpable new spirit of confidence. This is a reflection of the efforts of the African peoples coming together across borders and frontiers in thoughtful, impactful endeavours to improve their lives as well as their countries' prospects.

I commend President Kagame's leadership and insight for hosting this Conference and Heads of State present here today for their commitment to addressing the central issues and challenges of our time.

I am pleased that the Nation Media Group, which I founded in 1959, has been instrumental in initiating this Festival and conceptualising its thought leadership agenda - and that it has played a substantial role over decades in promoting responsible journalism and thoughtful discussion of issues and opportunities on the African continent. In keeping with this mission, this Festival brings together some of the best minds of Africa to take this agenda forward and, most importantly, implement many of the ideas and solutions that will be discussed here.

All of us recognise that there is much work to be done.

We have an opportunity - and responsibility - to assist people and communities to construct strong, resilient foundations, to ensure sustainable progress and lasting, positive change and to support and lift the hopeful voices of the continent's youth. This can most readily be accomplished when government, the private sector and civil society institutions work together to create an enabling environment, where people can plan and build for their future and for future generations of their family.

Sound development rests on learning from, and working with, people at the grassroots to help them articulate and realise their aspirations. It requires good governance and forging a better appreciation of the importance of pluralism across all sectors of society. To this end, the Ismaili

Imamat and the Aga Khan Development Network are committed to expanding our efforts, in partnership with others, to improve the quality of life for all Africans.

I am confident that Africa will continue to be a leader, in drawing on its historical experience, in building resilient, pluralistic, economically-strong, and environmentally- sound communities, rooted in solid values and communal support structures that societies in the West and elsewhere will admire and emulate in years to come. The rest of the World has much to learn from Africa.

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