AKU, AKAH, UCA launch climate change documentary series for South and Central Asia

Karachi, Pakistan and Geneva, Switzerland, 14 October 2020 - In a bid to spotlight the dire consequences of climate change in Central and South Asia, the Aga Khan University, the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat and the University of Central Asia launched a film series focusing on the catastrophic impact of the rapid melting of the world’s largest repository of ice outside the polar regions. Echoing the call to action of the #EarthshotPrize, Voices from the Roof of the World (VRW) will help local filmmakers produce impactful documentaries about the consequences of global warming for the wildlife and the 240 million people living among the world’s highest mountains and the almost two billion people dependent on the great rivers that all begin here. www.aku.edu/vrw

“The future of South and Central Asia will be decisively shaped by environmental conditions in the mountainous region stretching from Nepal to Kyrgyzstan,” said Aga Khan University President Firoz Rasul. “We believe it is crucial to draw attention to what is happening, what is at stake and what can be done to address this looming crisis. We aim to reach millions of people through Voices from the Roof of the World, and to build support for efforts to protect the region’s environment both for its inhabitants and the countless people who depend on its waters.”

“The people of the Himalayas, Hindu Kush, Karakoram and Pamir mountains live on the frontline of climate change, much like Pacific islanders and residents of the Bay of Bengal,” said Onno Rühl, General Manager of the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat. “The Aga Khan Agency for Habitat works with them to protect their habitat and to ensure that they can thrive, even with the mounting danger. By developing solutions and studying climate change adaptation, our work will benefit other people under similar threat, now and in the future. Not only will this project give vulnerable communities a voice, it will help others feel the starkness of the climate-change challenge.”

“Global warming is not coming. It is already here, and the University of Central Asia, through its Mountain Societies Research Institute, is uniquely placed in the region to respond to the challenges of climate change,” said Dr. Bohdan Krawchenko, Dean of the Graduate School of Development at the University of Central Asia. “Voices from the Roof of the World” can help in creating urgently needed awareness of issues such as water management and food security, and the potentially devastating impact of climate change on mountain communities.”

Voices from the Roof of the World (VRW) is based on an award-winning series of 52 half-hour documentaries called Giving Nature a Voice, created at the Aga Khan University’s Graduate School of Media and Communications in Nairobi, Kenya. That series has already prodded
policymakers, business leaders and citizens to take action, including banning plastic bags, stopping new coal fired energy plants and passing legislation to protect unregulated fisheries. VRW will use this proven model on the roof of the world.

“We are literally seeing the earth’s future go up in flames. Only by working together across borders and cultures can we hope to stop this impending disaster. From farmers to filmmakers, from scientists to students, we can all play an important role in saving our planet,” said Andrew Tkach, director of the Voices from the Roof of the World project.

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The Aga Khan University (AKU) is a pioneering institution of higher education that works to improve quality of life in the developing world and beyond. The University operates programmes in campuses in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and the United Kingdom, and treats more than 2 million patients per year at 7 hospitals and more than 350 medical centres. For more information, visit www.aku.edu.

The Aga Khan Agency for Habitat (AKAH) works to ensure that people live in physical settings that are as safe as possible from the effects of climate change and natural disasters; that those who live in high-risk areas are prepared to cope with and respond to disasters; and that these settings have access to basic services providing opportunities for a better quality of life. AKAH aims to help communities living on the frontlines of climate change – particularly in high mountains or urban centres – adapt and thrive by building resilient habitats and reducing emissions. Established in 2015, AKAH combines several agencies and programmes of the AKDN that had been operational since the 1990s in South and Central Asia, including Focus Humanitarian Assistance, the Aga Khan Planning and Building Services, the Disaster Risk Management Initiative and the Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan Fund for the Environment. AKAH’s countries of operation include Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Syria, Pakistan and India.

The mission of the University of Central Asia (UCA) is to promote the socio-economic development of the mountain communities of Central Asia. As such, it is a “development university”, thoroughly innovative in both its mission and programs, and benchmarked to meet international standards of excellence. By design, the campuses are located in mountainous rural settings of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, which have historically suffered because of marginalisation and paucity of socio-economic resources. UCA’s Mountain Societies Research Institute is at the forefront of supporting and enhancing the resiliency and quality of life of mountain societies through sound scientific and relevant research on issues of climate change, global warming, and food and water security.