



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

Aga Khan University Honours Graduates at Global Convocation Featuring Remarks by His Highness the Aga Khan and Melinda French Gates



22 May 2021 - The first-ever global convocation ceremony of the Aga Khan University (AKU) was live-streamed to a worldwide audience today, as 667 students on three continents received their degrees and listened to speeches by His Highness the Aga Khan, Chief Guest Melinda French Gates and AKU President Firoz Rasul.

His Highness the Aga Khan, AKU's founder and Chancellor, expressed his pride in the University's contributions to the fight against the pandemic and saluted the courage and resilience of its faculty, staff and students. He praised the graduates in Pakistan, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and the United Kingdom for having chosen "a path of service to humanity."

"The University has made a critical difference – advising national governments, training public-sector medical staff, working with teachers and schools, raising awareness through media and journalism, and doing everything possible to treat patients and to save lives," the Aga Khan said. He also noted the role of AKU researchers in tracking new mutations of the coronavirus, assessing the safety and effectiveness of vaccines and evaluating therapies for COVID-19.

Melinda French Gates, Co-chair and Trustee of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, commended the University for its leadership in improving health and empowering women, and voiced confidence in the graduates.

"The Aga Khan University is not only a global resource – it is a transformative force for public health and women's health," Ms. French Gates said. "We're proud of our partnership with AKU over the years."

"As graduates of AKU, you join a remarkable group of women and men who are changing lives for the better all over the world," she told the graduates. "And let me tell you: the world desperately needs your energy and leadership."

The Gates Foundation and the Aga Khan Development Network – including AKU – are working together in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and East Africa to improve health, advance economic development and create opportunities for women and girls. To date, the Foundation has provided approximately \$90 million in funding for research and other projects at AKU in areas including maternal and child health, infectious diseases, malnutrition and COVID-19. His Highness the Aga Khan thanked Ms. French Gates and the Gates Foundation for their support

of AKU and noted their “crucial and catalytic role” in battling the pandemic, improving health globally and advancing gender equality.

President Firoz Rasul told the graduates their AKU education has prepared them to make a profound difference in people’s lives. “You can be at the forefront in building the independent intellectual and scientific capacity that will enable Asia and Africa to tackle the biggest challenges facing them and the wider world,” he said.

Evidence that AKU prepares its graduates for global leadership was furnished by AKU alumna Dr. Anita Zaidi, who currently leads the Gates Foundation’s Gender Equality division, as well as its Vaccine Development and Surveillance, and Enteric and Diarrheal Diseases programmes. Introducing Ms. French Gates at the ceremony as a leader with a remarkable grasp of “both the technical and human aspects of delivering progress,” Dr. Zaidi called AKU “a beacon of knowledge, advocacy and action on maternal and child health” that had shaped her career.

Today, the Aga Khan said, AKU has “the confidence to broaden our horizons and expand our aspirations of excellence.” He said it would continue to increase its capacity to improve quality of life in Asia and Africa, both through cutting-edge research in fields such as stem cell science and artificial intelligence, and by developing into a comprehensive university active in the humanities and social sciences.

“This is a day for all of us to renew our commitment to an ever-more hopeful future,” he said.

Students received diplomas and degrees from AKU’s Medical Colleges, Schools of Nursing and Midwifery, Institutes for Educational Development, Graduate School of Media and Communications and Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations.

Read online: <https://www.akdn.org/press-release/global-virtual-convocation-aga-khan-university>