

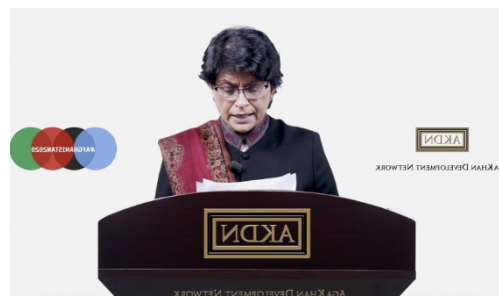
**Statement by His Highness the Aga Khan  
at the 2020 Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan  
Geneva, Switzerland, 24 November 2020**

*Delivered by Ms. Sheherazade Hirji,  
AKDN 's Diplomatic Representative to Afghanistan*

*Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim*

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank the Governments of Afghanistan and Finland and the United Nations for convening the international community at this special moment for Afghanistan and its peoples.



We join today with more hope than ever that peace is on the near horizon. But we are also all aware that this is a delicate moment in Afghan history.

After almost two decades working together, we must all do everything possible to help seize this opportunity. The Ismaili Imamat and the Aga Khan Development Network reaffirm our deep and enduring commitment to the Afghan peoples, and to a peaceful, pluralist Afghanistan.

One of the lessons AKDN has learned from its work globally is that diversity and pluralism in our thinking are essential. Traditionally, differences have been seen as something that divides. We know they can also be a source of positive strength. As the Chairman of the Global Centre for Pluralism, founded in partnership with the Government of Canada, I firmly believe that the support of the Centre can be valuable to all stakeholders, as Afghans discuss how to create a lasting and enduring peace, reflecting all views and perspectives, recognizing and respecting Afghanistan's rich diversity. I know that the Centre stands ready to support all the parties towards this goal.

As Afghanistan enters a new period of transition, it will need the contributions of all its people, men and women, in every part of the country, to address their common challenges: rising poverty, climate disruption, an unforgiving pandemic. It will need all their talents to build an inclusive future with more opportunities, requiring more education, more knowledge, more private initiative. In these endeavours, AKDN is, and will remain, a steadfast partner.

Above all, we must ensure that our renewed pledges of support here are translated into tangible gains there, at the community level. Because it is by enabling people to work together purposefully, with visible results, that Afghans of all backgrounds will realise the power of peace to change their lives.

This is why AKDN will maintain the breadth of its work across the country. We will remain deeply engaged with the country's education sector, where we have supported teachers and students, especially Afghan girls, in hundreds of schools. Our work to strengthen the health system spans our partnerships with Bamyán and Badakhshan, and the French Medical Institute for Children, with every AKDN agency contributing significantly to Afghanistan's pandemic response. In culture, AKDN has restored some 150 heritage sites – symbols of the strength that came from Afghanistan's connections to the rest of the world. The transformation of the Bala Hisar Citadel into an archaeological park is one of the latest examples of this work.

All of this must be underpinned by better economic opportunities for all Afghans. In this, AKDN has always insisted on the importance of Afghanistan's neighbours for the country's

prosperity. AKDN has invested in regional connectivity and cooperation for decades, making gains in clean energy, financial services, infrastructure, and telecommunications, as these all enable livelihoods and underpin job creation. We are pleased to have been entrusted to take on the generation, transmission and delivery of energy through Badakhshon Energy, an innovative public-private partnership for Afghanistan, serving the entire province. We will also continue to help build human capacity throughout Central Asia, linking Afghanistan to its brothers and sisters through education, healthcare, and the Aga Khan University and the University of Central Asia.

During our twenty-five years in Afghanistan, AKDN has been guided by a fundamental belief that the key to the country's future is in a vibrant, meritocratic, pluralistic civil society – in the Afghan people and in long-term institutions anchoring their contributions to the common good. As I close today, I reaffirm our commitment to working through them, along with the Afghan government and all our international partners, to strive for an Afghanistan that is peaceful, diverse, and dynamic.

Thank you.

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