

**Address by University of Alberta President David Turpin  
at the inauguration of the Aga Khan Garden, Alberta, Canada  
16 October 2018**

Thank-you all for coming to the inauguration of the Aga Khan Garden. I am your host, David Turpin, President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Alberta, and I am absolutely thrilled to be part of the official inauguration of this very special place.



I want to start by acknowledging with respect that we stand on Treaty 6 territory, and that the histories, languages and cultures of First Nations, Metis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, continue to enrich our vibrant community.

I would like to welcome our esteemed dignitaries today: Her Honour, the Honourable Lois Mitchell, Lieutenant Governor of Alberta; the Honourable Rachel Notley, Premier of Alberta and His Highness the Aga Khan.

I would also like to acknowledge a few, just a few, of the many dignitaries joining us today:

From the University of Alberta, Chancellor Douglas Stollery and Board Chair Michael Phair. From the Aga Khan University, President Firoz Rasul and Malik Talib, President of the Aga Khan Council for Canada.

We are also joined by our Chancellors and Board Chairs Emeritus, Ministers from the Government of Alberta, the Mayors of Devon, Spruce Grove and Edmonton, as well as other dignitaries – and, of course, all of you – our friends and alumni and supporters. Thank you all for being here.

I would also like to take just a moment to thank our university alumni and the members of our broader community who have made this event possible through their generous support.

This spectacular garden is intended to foster greater understanding between people of different cultures. It is aptly placed here among other culturally significant gardens, including the Indigenous Garden — the first Native Peoples Garden at a botanic garden in Canada — and the Kurimoto Japanese Garden, named after the first Japanese national to graduate from the University of Alberta.

This day has been more than 10 years in the making. It is the outcome of a very special relationship between the University of Alberta and the Aga Khan University that was formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2006 and renewed again in 2009 and again in 2017. The deep-rooted partnership between the two universities is marked by a longevity and sustainability that has transcended time and leadership transitions on both sides.

Together, we have collaborated in numerous teaching, learning and training initiatives in undergraduate programs, postgraduate studies, and internships in a wide variety of fields around the world.

Together, we have created knowledge networks that foster innovation through discussion, interaction and an emphasis on finding solutions to some of the most challenging problems facing communities everywhere in the world today.

Our partnership has transformed lives and communities through improvements and capacity-building in areas such as cardiology, nursing education and research, women's health and empowerment, copyright law, teacher education, and dental hygiene. We have fostered cultural understanding with collaborations in Islamic music, art, architecture, and literature.

In 2009, in recognition of this collaboration, and for his work to advance global humanitarianism, pluralism and social justice, the University of Alberta conferred an honorary degree on His Highness the Aga Khan.

In his speech to graduates, His Highness announced that he was giving the university a garden to mark the University of Alberta's 100th anniversary and his own golden jubilee, and to celebrate our growing partnership. Not just any garden, but a garden that would foster cultural understanding, academic research and teaching, provide economic benefit and facilitate social interaction.

A garden that would be one of just 11 other gardens of its type around the world. A place that would be a special symbol of our shared values and beliefs, most especially of the value of education and its ability to uplift society and to bring people together towards shared understanding.

His Highness said he hoped this garden would be a space of (and I quote) "educational and aesthetic value, a setting for learning more about Muslim culture and design, as well as a place for public reflection."

It was to be a contemporary interpretation of Islamic landscape architecture integrated into its northern location. Indeed, the northernmost Islamic Garden in the world, it bridges cultures, distances and time.

This summer, we opened the Aga Khan Garden to the public for the first time, and it has had an immediate impact. It has become a must-see destination for people to visit, and enjoy its beauty.

Everyone who experiences the garden feels the effect of this magnificent, transformative space. Our hard-working botanic garden staff have witnessed the garden come into being over the last year. The volunteer docents have learned about the culture, history and traditions of the great civilizations that built gardens like this in the past.

Everyone who visits the garden is struck by its precision and forethought - the intricacies of the fixtures, the specificity of the plants. They marvel at the way the garden so delicately blends architecture inspired by Mughal tradition with shrubs, trees, perennials, annuals and wetland plants that were selected to suit and reflect Alberta's climate.

The experience of the garden — not only its beauty and its serenity, but its cultural gravity ... the way it brings together our shared meanings, pleasures and identities — cannot be understated.

This garden is a fitting and beautiful representation of the collaboration between the University of Alberta and the Aga Khan University and our shared commitment to education, research and cultural understanding.

I want to thank His Highness the Aga Khan, for honouring us with this tremendous garden, which is one of only two in North America. It will be a space for reflection, education and leisure, for generations to come.

Your Highness, thank you.

Read online: <https://www.akdn.org/speech/mr-david-turpin/inauguration-aga-khan-garden-alberta>