

**Remarks by His Highness the Aga Khan  
at the KfW "Weiterdenken" ("Thinking Ahead") event  
15 January 2019  
Berlin, Germany**

*Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim*

Minister of State, Mr. Niels Annen,  
Professor Dr. Joachim Nagel,  
Members of Parliament,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,



It is my pleasure to celebrate here today the special partnership between Germany and the Aga Khan Development Network, or AKDN. Over the past 25 years, we have implemented almost € 600 million of programmes together in Asia and in Africa - spanning clean energy and infrastructure, water supply and sanitation, financial services and tourism, as well as education, health and civil society.

In all of this work, our relationship with the KfW Development Bank and DEG remains vital. And while AKDN has also cooperated with most of Germany's development actors, I should especially thank the Federal Foreign Office and the Ministry of Development, or BMZ, for their key support.

Tonight, we gather to recognise our shared commitments and achievements in Afghanistan, and reflect on lessons that might apply towards other contexts of fragility and crisis.

The breadth of AKDN's global partnership with Germany is reflected in extensive cooperation in Afghanistan. Together our institutions have strengthened regional connectivity through cross-border infrastructure; improved health through public-private partnerships; and restored Afghanistan's rich cultural heritage at the Bagh-e-Babur and Chihilsitoun Gardens, and now the Kabul riverfront project.

We have also used an innovative programme of small, community-led infrastructure projects to encourage local people to take charge of their development. This Stabilisation Programme for Northern Afghanistan was the springboard for today's conference and tonight's dialogue. Over € 100 million has been programmed through community consultations into 450 projects, responding to the needs identified by local people as most important to them. These build more than infrastructure: they also build trust, they enhance government legitimacy and civic engagement.

Those are vital ingredients for stability within any country, but especially for fragile regions. These are hallmarks of AKDN's approach, developed in places such as Northern Pakistan, post-conflict Tajikistan or Afghanistan, as well as Syria, Mali, Mozambique and elsewhere.

From this experience in stabilisation, we would emphasise three crucial elements:

The first key lesson is to concentrate at the local level. Wherever the national conditions are unfavourable - in fragile or conflict situations they rarely are favourable - meaningful changes often start fastest locally, quickly building credibility and confidence.

The second lesson is that commitment to pluralism is essential. The consultations must be wide, and everyone in the community must benefit. I have learnt this lesson during my more than 60

years as the Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, responsible for the spiritual and physical well-being of my Jamat and - most crucially in this context - for those with whom they live, whatever their faith or creed.

Finally, we would insist on the critical importance of civil society, which we refer to as private organisations designed to serve public goals. Such institutions are stabilising factors and points of continuity where security is fragile and politics are volatile. Consequently, investing in them, alongside the state, remains critical.

I look forward to the rest of tonight's discussion and reflection on these important topics.

The world needs Germany's principled and pragmatic leadership role - now more than ever. As Germany reflects on the future of its commitment in Afghanistan and the nature of its engagement in other parts of the world, I hope that it will draw on these principles that have guided our cooperation together over such a long time - emphasising local participation, promoting pluralism and strengthening the institutions of civil society.

Thank you very much.

Read online : <https://www.akdn.org/speech/his-highness-aga-khan/kfw-weiterdenken-thinking-ahead-event>