

**Speech by the Chairman of the UCA Board of Trustees, Shamsh Kassim-Lakha
at the formal inauguration of UCA's Khorog campus
Tajikistan, 14 September 2018**

Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim

Your Excellency, President Emomali Rahmon
Honorable Members of the Government of the Republic
of Tajikistan and Governor of Gorno Badakhshan
Autonomous Oblast
Excellencies
Trustees of UCA
Distinguished Guests
Faculty Members, Staff and Students



As-salaam-o-alaikum

Man tashrifi-shumo, peshvoyee millat janobi-olli, Emomali Rahmon, wa mehmononi olli qadrrro badonishgohi osiyoi markazee sidqan khaira maqdam me gooyum

(I warmly welcome the Leader of the Nation, Your Excellency Emomali Rahmon and distinguished guests to the University of Central Asia.)

Let me begin by expressing my sincere gratitude on behalf of the Board of Trustees of UCA to Your Excellency, President Emomali Rahmon for inaugurating the Khorog campus of the University of Central Asia. I recall vividly that President Rahmon was the first to join the Chancellor of UCA, His Highness the Aga Khan in conceiving the idea of this University. Your Excellency was also the first among the Presidents of the three Founding States, to sign the UCA Charter in August 2000. This is indeed a tribute to your foresight and commitment to higher education.

I take this opportunity to thank the Minister of Education Said Nuruddin Said and his Ministry colleagues for their support to UCA. The recent signing of the Agreement of Cooperation between the Ministry of Education and UCA is an important example of collaboration which will enhance our mutually beneficial relationship.

For over 1,000 years the ancestors of His Highness the Aga Khan have had a tradition of sponsoring higher education. His Highness's own commitment to that tradition is reflected in sponsoring the Aga Khan University in 1983, and the University of Central Asia. We offer special gratitude to His Highness the Aga Khan whose vision, continued stewardship and attention to every aspect of this University have enabled us to witness this important day.

The University was established under an International Treaty executed by the Republics of Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and the Ismaili Imamat. It was ratified by the respective Parliaments and registered with the United Nations. The Founders envisaged UCA as one university with equitable presence in all three countries. Its location and academic programmes are derived from the Founders' commitment to improving the quality of life of the peoples of Central Asia, particularly those in its mountain regions.

The Trustees who have responsibility for governing the University are appointed by the Chancellor and the honourable Presidents of its Founding States, who are Patrons of the University. The Trustees bring a wealth of experience with distinguished backgrounds in academia, government, the private sector, and civil society. On their recommendation, the Chancellor has appointed Prof Dr Syed Sohail Naqvi as the first Rector of UCA. He has distinguished himself in research, academic administration and higher education reforms.

The campus we are inaugurating today follows the first residential campus built in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan, which was commissioned in 2016. The third campus will soon be built in Tekeli, Kazakhstan. All campuses were designed by the award-winning Japanese architect Arata Isozaki. The buildings on each UCA campus represent only the first phase. This campus was constructed mainly by small and medium size contractors from Tajikistan to ensure maximum economic fallout benefit for the local and regional economies.

The investment of \$95 million in the Khorog campus was provided by the Aga Khan Development Network, supplemented by a soft loan from the Overseas Private Investment Corporation of the US.

Here in Khorog, students will study Economics and Earth and Environmental Sciences, whereas those in Kyrgyzstan specialize in Computer Science and, Media and Communications. Our Campus in Kazakhstan will offer Business Management and Engineering degrees. Instruction is in English. Tajik as well as regional languages are also taught.

Admission is strictly on merit defined by academic ability and motivation to study. Students receive a broad-based education in the tradition of liberal arts, that is, a general education that opens their minds to the humanities, arts and sciences before specializing in their chosen disciplines. Here in Khorog, all will learn the beauty of the Tajik language, study the rich history of the Somoni Empire, and absorb the culture of Tajikistan. They will understand the meaning of Rudaki's famous couplet:

donish andar dil charogh-e rawshan ast
w-az hama bad bar tan-e tu jawshan ast

*(Knowledge in the heart is a bright lamp
And a shield for your body against all adversities)*

In a fully-residential setting, students learn about diversity, pluralism and ethics in practice. The University is working hard to ensure students come from all corners of Tajikistan, the other Founding States and from the regional countries. Your Excellency's presence here and information about UCA on the national media will go a long way towards informing the people of Tajikistan and future students about this new world-class educational opportunity in the country.

Seeking solutions to societal problems cannot be outsourced – it has to be indigenously driven. Therefore, our Graduate School of Development is strongly focused on research. This will be grounded in the history and culture of this region, and close to peoples' issues.

It's Institute of Public Policy and Administration in Bishkek is collaborating with the Institute of Public Administration under the President's Office in Tajikistan. This joint effort aims to deliver a highly contextual programme on economic policies for innovation and growth.

The Mountain Societies Research Institute of our Graduate School, which is located on the Khorog campus, allows closer integration with the Earth and Environmental Sciences. Its research will concentrate on issues of global warming, natural disasters and food security in these vulnerable regions. This Institute is also involved in developing the research capacity of the faculty of natural and biological sciences at Khorog State University.

To deliver education at this level of quality we have recruited faculty on merit from Central Asia, Russia, North America, South Asia and Europe. Under a plan to promote the appointment of nationals from Tajikistan and Central Asia, we sent some 40 scholars to renowned universities. Already 8 of them have graduated and joined the UCA faculty.

While the Khorog campus is new, UCA is proud of its history of involvement in Tajikistan. Since 2006, the third unit of UCA, its School of Professional and Continuing Education, has trained over 64,000 learners in Dushanbe and Khorog in English, Information Technology, financial accounting and other subjects. Soon we will open a Learning Centre in Bokhtar and one in Khujand.

Let me assure Your Excellency President Rahmon, that the scholars at UCA stand ready to collaborate with your Government, and through their research, address the challenges you consider important.

Finally, on behalf of everyone at UCA, I express our profound appreciation to President Rahmon and the Governments of Tajikistan and GBAO as well as to His Highness the Aga Khan and the AKDN agencies for their valuable support and encouragement.

Let me close my remarks with a quote from Nizomi which I hope the students present here and those who will walk the halls of this campus in future will seriously take to heart:

**har ki z-omukhtan nadorad nang
gul barorad zi khor-u laal az sang**

English translation:

***One who does not shy away from learning
Can turn a thorn into a flower and a stone into a ruby***

Thank you.

Read online: <https://www.akdn.org/speech/dr-shamsh-kassim-lakha/inauguration-ucas-khorog-campus>