

Speech by President Firoz Rasul
at the Donation Ceremony of the Da Vinci Surgical System
to Centro Hospitalar Universitario de Lisboa Central
Lisbon, Portugal, 8 November 2019

Bismillah-ir Rahman ir Rahim

His Excellency Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, President of the Portuguese Republic,
His Highness the Aga Khan,
Minister of Health, Madame Marta Temido,
President of the Central Hospitals of Lisbon, Madame Rosa Valente Matos,
Diplomatic Representative of the Ismaili Imamat to the Portuguese Republic, Comendador, Nazim Ahmad,
Member of the Portuguese Delegation to the Seat Agreement's Joint Committee, Mr. João Pedro Antunes,
Leaders of the Aga Khan Development Network and the Ismaili Imamat,
Distinguished guests,



On behalf of His Highness the Aga Khan, I would like to welcome you to this inauguration ceremony.

We are especially honoured that the His Excellency, the President has joined us for this special occasion. Thank you, Your Excellency, not only for your presence, but for the gracious welcome and partnership that the Portuguese Republic has extended to the Ismaili Imamat.

We are here today to celebrate a milestone in the relationship between the Ismaili Imamat and the Portuguese Republic: the Ismaili Imamat's donation of a Da Vinci surgical system to the Centro Hospitalar Universitário Lisboa Central, to be installed here, at the Curry Cabral Hospital. This is a cutting-edge, robotics-assisted technology for performing minimally invasive precision surgical procedures. It is the first such system in a public hospital in Portugal, and hence available to benefit the entire population of the country.

Yet while this technology is advanced and complicated, its impact is simple to state: it will expand access to high-quality surgical care for Portuguese suffering from a wide range of conditions, helping to ensure that they can lead healthy lives. As such, it will positively impact thousands of individuals and their loved ones. That is truly worth celebrating, and we are looking forward to seeing the evidence of this technology's positive impact on quality of life through improved outcomes from difficult surgical procedures.

The donation of the Da Vinci system is further evidence of the strengthening bond between the Ismaili Imamat and the Portuguese Republic, and of their joint commitment to improving quality of life in Portugal, in Portuguese-speaking countries of Africa, and beyond.

The relationship between Portugal and the Ismaili Imamat is longstanding. We well remember the welcome this country showed to the Ismailis who left Mozambique in the 1970s. And since the government's generous invitation to establish the Seat of the Ismaili Imamat here in Lisbon in 2015, that connection has been steadily expanding and deepening.

For example, the Aga Khan Development Network and Portugal's Foundation for Science and Technology have partnered on the Knowledge for Development Initiative. Under this initiative, researchers in Portugal, Portuguese-speaking Africa, and at agencies of the Aga Khan Development Network are working to develop solutions to crucial challenges facing Africa. The first call awarded grant funding to 16 research projects, and the scope ranged from developing crops that can cope with climate change to understanding rising levels of drug-resistant HIV, malaria, and tuberculosis.

Today, we are witnessing one of the first fruits of the partnership between the Aga Khan University and the Ministry of Health, which is another dimension of our strong relationship.

For those of you unfamiliar with the Aga Khan University – or AKU, as we call ourselves – we were founded in 1983 by our Chancellor, His Highness the Aga Khan. We were Pakistan's first private, not-for-profit university. We now also have campuses, programmes, and hospitals in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Afghanistan, and the United Kingdom.

The Aga Khan University was recently named one of the top 100 universities worldwide in clinical medicine by the Shanghai Ranking of World Universities – the only university in Asia to achieve that distinction. In 2019, the Aga Khan University and its fellow agencies of the Aga Khan Development Network will treat over 6 million patients, many in hospitals and outreach clinics accredited by organisations such as the US-based Joint Commission International and the College of American Pathologists. For those of you in the health business, you know these are the gold standards.

As president of the University, it is my pleasure to thank Minister Marta Temido and her predecessor, Professor Adalberto Campos Fernandes – who I am pleased to see here today – for their embrace of AKU as a partner. It was Professor Fernandes and the Curry Cabral's renowned and recently retired surgical leader, Professor Eduardo Barroso, who identified the great need for a surgical robot in the national referral public hospital in Portugal – which ultimately led to today's generous donation, which was finalised with Minister Marta Temido.

The relationship between AKU and the Ministry holds great promise. Our Memorandum of Understanding envisions mutually beneficial collaborations in operating room management, emergency care, data analysis, research, and many other areas.

When Professor Eduardo Barroso visited AKU's campus in Karachi, he proposed a collaboration on surgical specialties, including robot-assisted procedures. With the assistance of Professor Barroso and his team, AKU is working to begin commencing liver transplant operations at our hospitals in Karachi and Nairobi. This would be a major benefit to the people of Pakistan and East Africa.

At the same time, the Aga Khan University is assisting Portuguese medical schools in developing their capacity to train doctors and nurses using state-of-the-art simulation and virtual-reality tools.

As a delegation from the Ministry of Health discovered during its visit to the Aga Khan University, our own Centre for Innovation in Medical Education is second-to-none in this field.

And there are still more linkages growing between Portuguese institutions and the institutions of the Ismaili Imam. The Aga Khan University now has active partnerships with the Catholic University of Portugal and the NOVA University of Lisbon. In June of this year, AKU and NOVA co-hosted an international symposium in Lisbon on the ethics of stem-cell research and regenerative medicine, which is the next phase of medical advancement. That event brought together experts from seven countries and different faiths to discuss the latest issues in this rapidly advancing field, and to lay the groundwork for assisting low-income countries in developing their own legal and regulatory frameworks based on the ethics of these new discoveries.

The Aga Khan University and Catolica are working together to create an online database of tens of thousands of documents held at the Overseas Historical Archive in Lisbon – documents that cover Portuguese activity in the Indian Ocean region from the 16th to the 19th century. It is an exciting project that will enable scholars worldwide to deepen our understanding of centuries of cross-cultural interaction and the long reach and influence of Portugal in history.

I am pleased to say that AKU also has emerging relationships with the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Champalimaud Foundation. Ultimately, what makes these partnerships possible is the values we all hold in common.

As the donation we are celebrating today demonstrates, we all believe that every person ought to have access to outstanding health care, regardless of where they were born or their financial resources. This is the vision of our Chancellor, of making sure access to the highest quality care is available to everyone, regardless of where they are from or their financial condition.

So, whether you live in Portugal, Mozambique, Kenya, or Pakistan – whether you are a patient in a public hospital or a private hospital – you should be able to benefit from the latest diagnostics, treatments, and technologies.

We all believe in the power of partnership to improve people's lives and positively impact institutions and societies. Partnerships are two-way streets. Both parties must contribute to them and nurture them. Reciprocal benefits flow from collective commitments of time, funds, knowledge, expertise, or equipment. The donation of the Da Vinci system reflects our commitment to the partnership between the Ismaili Imam and its institutions and Portugal.

It is given in the spirit of all true gifts – in recognition of all that we may have already received, in acknowledgement of all that we will gain, with a full heart and a sense of gratitude. And it is also given with optimism regarding the future, and our collective capacity to shape it for the better.

Thank you very much.

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