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PRESS RELEASE

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HIS HIGHNESS THE AGA KHAN MARKS HIS GOLDEN JUBILEE

Envisages Major Opportunity for the Development of Civil Society

Gouvieux, France, 12 July 2007 –His Highness the Aga Khan, spiritual leader of the Shia Ismaili Muslims yesterday committed himself to support democratic processes, to find means to help the ultra-poor, and to address political and theological tensions through consensus amongst all Muslims.

The Aga Khan was speaking at a ceremony that marked the 50th anniversary of his accession to the Ismaili Imamate. He succeeded his grandfather, Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah Aga Khan as the 49th hereditary Imam on 11th July 1957. The colourful ceremony was attended by over 250 leaders from the Ismaili community from some 25 countries.

Speaking about the development of the various institutions that constitute the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), one of the largest not-for-profit development networks in the world, the Aga Khan said he had been most fortunate in having the support of wise men and women from the Ismaili communities throughout the world whose honorary service was a continuum of the magnificent, timeless tradition of service.

Reflecting on the changes that have taken place since he assumed the Imamate, and to which the Ismaili community had to respond, the Aga Khan mentioned decolonisation, the cold war, the fall of communism and effects of globalisation worldwide.

He expressed the hope that his Golden Jubilee will enable the institutions and activities of the AKDN to strengthen and consolidate themselves, in order to assist in the various countries where the Ismaili community is settled and that these institutions would create opportunities for future generations.

The Aga Khan highlighted the value of civil society and how its effectiveness could contribute towards better processes of democratic government. In many countries of Asia and Africa, the Aga Khan said, “Democracy is young and still relatively ineffective in support of modern development activities. While a strong civil society can and does help to counter-balance such ineffectiveness, the processes of democratic government must also receive more attention and support” he said.

The Aga Khan thanked the Ismaili community for the generosity and support over the past 50 years that helped him turn a system of local projects, into one of the world’s largest private development networks that serves people of all faiths.

Turning to the present global conflictual situations that are depicted as opposing Islam and the West, the Aga Khan emphasised that Muslims themselves would be the best suited to address some of the issues facing them in the modern context. He called for the revitalisation of the essential

values of Islam which he felt could only be done through greater collaboration among different interpretations of the faith.

“Political situations with a theological overlay are causing disaffection or antagonism between communities of the same faith, and even more so amongst different faiths,” said the Aga Khan. “At the centre of this turbulence is Islam. We cannot let this continue. On the other hand, the sheer scale of the problem, added to its complexity, make it an issue which the Ummah in its entirety can better address, rather than individual schools of interpretation within it.”

The Aga Khan leads a community of 12-15 million Ismaili Muslims living in some 25 countries, mainly in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe and North America. He is founder and chairman of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), a group of nine agencies with mandates ranging from health and education to architecture, microfinance, disaster reduction, rural development, and the promotion of private-sector enterprise and the revitalisation of historic cities – all of which are catalysts for development. Guided by the Islamic ethic of compassion for those less fortunate, the AKDN works for the common good of all citizens, regardless of their gender, origin or religion.

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