

**THE FUTURE OF THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY :
EVOLUTION OF A VISION**



Report of the Chancellor's Commission

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The Aga Khan University (AKU) celebrated its 10th anniversary this November in Karachi. A little more than ten years had passed since AKU was granted its Charter from the Government of Pakistan to become the first private university in a country of more than 100 million people. In this first decade, the Aga Khan University Medical Centre has been the pioneer venture of the University. Its Faculty of Health Sciences, embracing the School of Nursing and the Medical College, has been established with a commitment to high standards and innovative programmes that address the health needs of Pakistan and other developing countries. Its teaching hospital has been meeting the challenges of providing high quality service for the diverse medical needs of a vast tropical city and its surrounding nation, while also achieving financial viability.

AKU's Charter envisaged that the University would reach out beyond the health sciences to other fields and by its 10th anniversary AKU had added its recently-started Institute for Educational Development. A University concerned to address major needs of the developing and Muslim worlds could not long delay in adding education to its health commitments. The field was new to it but the Institute could be based on the long-standing engagement and experience of the Aga Khan Development Network with school management and the improvement programmes in Pakistan and other countries.

Bringing a university from conception to living reality is a demanding and absorbing undertaking, and perhaps especially so for one that chose to face the complexities of building a medical school and the provision of medical services at the outset. Only after several years of detailed planning and preparation was it possible for the rapid development of this medical centre to come about as an institution of quality, relevance and originality. Similarly, several years of study, planning and assembling of resources were needed before the Institute for Educational Development could be confidently launched.

Realisation of the original vision of the Aga Khan University has also required the commitment, understanding and support of a great many people and institutions. The University could not have come together in November for its 10th anniversary celebration without

having had donors to provide its campus, contributions for its fine buildings, its endowment, equipment, books, and research, and indeed, for much of the myriad paraphernalia that serious university work and service requires. It could not have assembled for that happy occasion without the professors who have committed their energies and learning to this new university; without the successive classes of students who have braved the rigours of demanding and innovative programmes; without the doctors, nurses, and technicians who have made the teaching hospital function. It needed too the academic leaders and executives who have reliably and creatively planned its work and seen to it that all the necessary parts of a complex enterprise were in place at the right times, and that troublesome problems and crises were coped with as they arose. We should remember too the many volunteers and other workers whose often humble functions are indispensable to an institution that reliably and faithfully serves those who come to it to learn or to be helped.

The day-to-day and year-to-year tasks of building a university require focused attention and persistence through the frustrations and disappointments that inevitably come in any enterprise. The Board of Trustees and I have felt from the beginning that it was important to have a vision of the goals of all this effort, a vision of the character and mission of the Aga Khan University to which we could turn as a guide in good times and bad. Our Charter, The Aga Khan University Order 1983, and my address at the Charter Presentation Ceremony affirmed that this University would engage in the promotion and dissemination of knowledge in the health sciences and other fields, in Pakistan and internationally; it would be a private, autonomous Muslim university open to all without distinction of sex, race, creed or domicile; and it would concern itself particularly with the development and civilisations of the Pakistan nation, the Islamic Ummah and the Third World countries of Asia and Africa.

I was not, however, content with general statements of these sorts, but had sought planning assistance in a study by a Harvard Committee under the chairmanship of Derek Bok, then Harvard's President. The report of this study,

a document of some 200 pages, was presented to us in 1983. It confirmed the need for a private, autonomous university of international quality and distinction, that would address generic problems of the developing and Muslim worlds in fresh and original ways. The report went on to propose specific courses of development through which we might pursue this mission.

Early in the present decade, the Board of Trustees of the University became conscious of a need to review how the development of AKU thus far and the great changes that have gone on in the world might affect its future. There were urgent questions concerning the Faculty of Health Sciences and the hospital which were addressed by a Medical Centre Committee that submitted its report in 1993. The Board had proposed in 1991 that a "senior panel" be appointed to undertake a broader review. The report presented in this volume is the product of two years' study and reflection by a Chancellor's Commission which I appointed in 1992, following on the Board's recommendation. It has been reviewed and formally accepted by the Board and by myself, as Chancellor, as the guiding statement of the mission and character of AKU as we intend it to be in the years to come.

The title of this report, "The Future of the Aga Khan University : Evolution of a Vision" expresses accurately the general conclusions of the Commission. It was asked to review the founding vision of the University and the conceptions for its development that were set forth in the Harvard Report. The Commission undertook a very broad review of changes in higher education and research and in the general situation of the developing and Muslim worlds; it also assessed the effects that our experience and problems in bringing AKU to its present state, and changes elsewhere in the Aga Khan Development Network, might have had. These reviews did not lead the Commission to think any sharp transformations in the original vision of AKU were required for the future. The need for AKU as a private, autonomous international institution of quality and distinction, serving the developing and Muslim worlds in original ways, was found to be at least as compelling as it was when AKU was founded. Like the Harvard Committee, the Chancellor's Commission emphasises that AKU must seek

distinction by strong commitments to research and education of the highest standards. It differs somewhat from the specific Harvard recommendations in the fields and components it projects for the future AKU. But in its broad character as an open international university devoted to free enquiry and to enhanced futures for both men and women in the Muslim and developing worlds, AKU projected by this report holds to the principles traced by its predecessors.

Just as it took the devoted and generous efforts of very many people to bring AKU to celebration of its first decade, translating the conceptions of the future AKU set forth in this report into working realities will pose demanding challenges to all concerned with AKU's future. The Commission was given a broad charge and faithfully kept its thoughts on the longer term future and the general design of the University. It was conscious that it could not and should not try to work out detailed plans for the components it has proposed for the future AKU. Meetings with the present faculty and staff, and study of memoranda they prepared, have had important effects on the Commission's views. And these exchanges, like those with the Board of Trustees, heightened the Commission's awareness of the immense amount of detailed planning and focused effort that lies ahead if its recommendations are to be seriously pursued. But it has been concerned that these efforts be guided by a common vision and that the future AKU be more than a collection of faculties and institutes each absorbed in its own work. The Commission has projected AKU as an international university with branches in different parts of the world and addressing different fields of knowledge. But these branches must be linked among themselves and to networks in the wider academic world by utilising the best of modern communications and information processing. The University must have a sense of coherence in its mission through commitment to common values such as openness and the advancement of women, and to high and common standards of scholarship, research, teaching and service. Our hope must be that the conceptions set forth in this report will provide guides and reference points to keep the builders of AKU's future on a common path as they press forward with their own specific responsibilities.

The great future for which we aspire for AKU must depend above all on the quality and commitment of those who will shoulder the thousands of specific tasks that lie ahead. The appointment of the Chancellor's Commission was inspired by the faith that a clear and credible vision of what AKU can and should be will inspire and guide our efforts. Plans and visions are poor things if they engender no action. It is our hope that wide distribution of this report among those who have made AKU what it now is, and care about its future, will stir lively interest and careful examination of the ideas it contains. The Commission itself has now completed its work and dissolved into history. But the acceptance of this report by the Trustees, and by myself as Chancellor, means that we will be seeking to use it as a guide in our efforts to build the AKU of the future. And it assures our receptive attention, and that of all our senior leaders, to reactions from members of the University community of whatever station.

It is my belief that the very wide-ranging view of the needs and problems of the developing and Muslim worlds, and particularly in higher education and research, which the Commission has taken will be of interest considerably beyond the Aga Khan University. The Trustees and I have thought that the Commission's efforts to conceive what a university concerned with the developing and Muslim worlds might aim to do in the next quarter century might also offer ideas to others facing similar challenges for the future.

We believe that the Commission has viewed the future with sober realism but also with hopeful imagination. We find its report a source of inspiration for AKU that we intend to keep before us. We hope others too may find inspiration and enlightenment from it.

Aga Khan.

Chancellor, The Aga Khan University