

Speech of President Firoz Rasul

University of Alberta

April 7, 2017

Premier Notley

President Turpin

Dean Blade

Thomas Woltz

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

If I had to choose one word that captures what we are celebrating today, it would be “exchange.” For it is by making possible the exchange of knowledge, perspectives and opportunities that our partnership is enriching our students, faculties and, ultimately, the communities we serve.

Today, we have renewed our partnership. We have done so on the basis of our shared values and our shared goals. These include our mutual embrace of pluralism – the idea that humanity’s differences are not something to be merely tolerated, but a source of strength. And they

include our conviction that universities can make a tremendous difference in people's lives – including the lives of people in the developing world.

Another reason we have renewed our partnership is that we have already witnessed its success and impact over the past decade, both here in Alberta and overseas. Much credit for the success of this relationship goes to Dr. Carl Amrhein, who served as Provost at the time and visited AKU campuses in Africa and Asia, and AKDN sites in Central Asia.

In Tanzania, we have worked together to improve math education in rural areas. With UAlberta support, we are helping to lead the fight against the growing problem of non-communicable diseases in East Africa, especially heart disease.

U of A students have done internships at AKU in Pakistan, Kenya and Tanzania, working on projects such as a series of interactive dramas for urban youth in Nairobi. Alberta medical students have come to our

hospitals to do clinical electives and learn more about global health challenges.

Meanwhile, numerous AKU alumni and faculty have done graduate and postgraduate work at UAlberta. For example, our alumni have completed fellowships in fields such as cardiac surgery – and their professors have reported they are some of the best fellows they have ever had. Faculty from our School of Nursing and Midwifery have earned degrees at the U of A, and returned to AKU to share their new knowledge and skills with their students.

Alberta has assisted us in developing our curricula in several fields, and in enhancing our libraries. The U of A has also accepted students on merit from Aga Khan secondary schools as part of its international recruitment efforts.

In short, it has been a very productive and mutually beneficial relationship. And the best is surely yet to come – as we will be exploring

new opportunities in fields ranging from the health sciences to environmental sciences to the humanities and beyond.

In addition to renewing our partnership, today we are offering a first glimpse of what will stand as its symbol. As you will see shortly, the newest addition to the University of Alberta Botanic Garden is an extraordinary work of landscape architecture. It will be a space for learning about, discovering and experiencing the local environment; for reflection and enjoyment; and for bringing people of all ages and backgrounds together. It embodies not just our partnership but the very idea of exchange between cultures.

While drawing upon the form and design principles of the traditional Islamic Garden, it subtly refashions them for a new context. For in a tradition dating back 1,200 years, this may be the coldest climate in which an Islamic Garden has been built.

Yet like the millions of immigrants who have come to Canada in search of a better life, it is very much at home in its surroundings. Its success shows that the Islamic Garden is a flexible form with much to say that is relevant to 21st century Alberta. At the same time, its presence opens up new perspectives on an important Muslim cultural tradition. As I said, it represents an exchange – one that enriches us all.

It is therefore with great pleasure that I announce today the gift of the Garden by His Highness the Aga Khan to the University of Alberta and the people of Alberta. This gift is an expression of His Highness's gratitude and a reflection of the esteem in which he holds Alberta and Canada, for the welcome they have shown and the good they are doing.

It is also with great pleasure that I acknowledge all those who have joined together to make its creation possible – the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, the U of A and its leadership, Thomas Woltz and his colleagues at NBW, the staff of the Botanic Garden, and the Government of Alberta.

We look forward to its opening, just as we look forward to working with President Turpin, Dean Blade and many others to expand our partnership and to make a difference in the world.

Thank you.