

---

II THE STATED AIMS AND MISSION  
OF THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

I The Commission has studied statements that have been made on the intended character and mission of AKU. The principal ones are as follows :

i) The Aga Khan University Order 1983 gave a Pakistan charter to AKU with very broad and unrestricted purposes in the "Promotion and dissemination of knowledge and technology ... in the health sciences and such other branches of learning as the University may determine ... in Pakistan or abroad."

Section 5 of the Charter asserts : "The University shall be open to all persons of either sex of whatever religion, race, creed, colour or domicile who are academically qualified".

ii) In his address at the Charter Presentation Ceremony on March 16, 1983, His Highness the Aga Khan said :

*"This will be a Muslim university ... it will draw its inspiration from the great traditions of Islamic civilisation and learning ... [including] two fundamental aspects of our Faith : the limitlessness of God's power and the brotherhood of man ...*

*"The overall aim of the Aga Khan University will be to make clear and rational judgements as to which foreseeable future needs of the developing countries require new educational programmes and, having identified those openings, to address them by the appropriate means, setting the highest standards possible, whether in teaching, in research or in service.*

*"The Aga Khan University has a number of constituencies to which the Charter encourages it to respond and with which it must keep faith: the Pakistan Nation, the Islamic Ummah, including my own Community, the Third World countries of Asia and Africa ... it must address itself to subjects relevant to the development and civilisations of these constituencies, if possible responding to challenges in an international context.*

*"This is why the Charter specifically allows the University to establish faculties abroad. Whilst it is too early to say where these might be, it is my wish that this should become an international University, able to mobilise resources from other countries, to co-ordinate international research and to encourage the exchange of ideas between nations.*

---

*“... one thing must remain constant : the mission of preparing graduates, men and women, to play constructive, worthwhile and responsible roles in society.”*

iii) The so-called “Harvard Report” was prepared by a committee at Harvard University under the chairmanship of Derek Bok, then Harvard’s President, in response to a request from His Highness. The Harvard group was asked to develop “conceptual options for the university”; it undertook an extensive study and presented a report of some 190 pages plus appendices in October 1983. This report (formally entitled, “Possible Courses for Development of the Aga Khan University”) had several basic recommendations on the character of AKU :

- It should be international, private, and “distinctive in substance or quality or both”.

- It “ought not be a big conventional university with the familiar array of schools and faculties”.

- It should serve the Ismaili community and the Muslim world, and address “generic problems of development in the Third World”.

The Harvard Report stressed the need for distinctiveness in AKU since it would be a small institution and would not make a significant quantitative addition to higher education in the Muslim world. Distinctiveness could be achieved in several ways - by better preparation of students, by setting an example of quality in the Muslim world, by contributing to international understanding - and, as the Report particularly emphasised, by “research on important questions for the Muslim and Third Worlds”.

2 There is a basic consistency in these statements of what AKU should be, amid slight differences in emphasis. The Harvard emphasis on the research functions AKU should pursue is carried into detail in that report’s recommendation on the components AKU should develop in the future. The Harvard Committee saw the **quality of education offered by AKU** as a potential basis for its distinctiveness but did not match His Highness’ eloquence on the type of graduates AKU should aim to supply to the world. His Highness and the Harvard group alike wanted AKU to serve the developing and Muslim worlds,

both directly as the Aga Khan University Hospital (AKUH) was beginning to do and in the solving of development problems that the Harvard Report urged as a focus for new parts of the University. Like other universities, AKU would be devoted to education, research and service.

For the Commission to assess how changes in the world may have affected the aims and mission of AKU, it has needed to form judgements on the present state of higher education, research and scholarship, and at least make some guesses as to their likely character and quality over the next quarter century. The following section of our report is devoted to this subject.