The Architectural League of New York awards the 2017 President’s Medal to His Highness the Aga Khan

New York, USA, 19 May 2017 – The Architectural League of New York awarded its President’s Medal to His Highness the Aga Khan on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture. The President’s Medal is The Architectural League’s highest honor and is bestowed, at the discretion of the League’s President and Board of Directors, on individuals to recognize an extraordinary body of work in architecture, urbanism, art, or design.

His Highness the Aga Khan was honored, in the words of the Medal’s citation “for the extraordinary work of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture and the recognition, scholarship, and investment it has catalyzed and supported, which has raised the quality of urban and rural environments around the world.” It continues: “His Highness has demonstrated the capacity for architecture to be encompassing and inclusive, through his probing search to conceive anew the nature of cultural identity and continuity, his openness to innovation and experimentation, and his unwavering commitment to pluralism as a foundational principle of human community. By acknowledging not only the complexity and imperfection of the world we have created, but also its potential, His Highness the Aga Khan has set a magnificent example of stewardship and hope.”

The Medal was presented to His Highness the Aga Khan on 18 May 2017 at a dinner at the Metropolitan Club by League President Billie Tsien. Humanities scholar Homi K. Bhabha, city planner Amanda M. Burden, and architect Diébédo Francis Kéré celebrated His Highness the Aga Khan with remarks.

Homi K. Bhabha remarked that: “Pluralistic inquiry is the living link between the good society and public space; and architecture is the arc of this ancient and intimate connection.” He continued: “The aspiration of the Aga Khan Award, as I understand it, is to build structures and systems that enable dialogue, collaboration, and affiliation amongst communities—national, regional and diasporic—who live side by side.”

In her presentation of the Medal, Billie Tsien said: “The Aga Khan Award has been a bridge connecting the world to the beauty and power of work done to serve Muslim populations.” She continued: “This award helps to elevate the quality of architecture, planning and landscape design by shedding light on exemplary work. And most importantly it affirms the power of architecture to create and to sustain a humane and beautiful world for all people. All people, all cultures, all faiths look to beauty as a profound source of both solace and joy.”
In accepting the medal, His Highness remarked, “in thinking about the way societies live in the developing world, in the industrialized world, I came to a very simple conclusion: what is the art form that has the most important impact on every society, in every part of the world? And the answer is quite simply, architecture. “It’s a very important evening in my life because it’s a recognition of an art form that which I believe needs global recognition, needs global attention, needs the best brains that we can mobilize, to improve the human habitat for decades and decades ahead. Thank you for this wonderful award,” he concluded.

The dinner’s 330 guests included family of His Highness the Aga Khan: Princess Zahra Aga Khan, Prince Hussain Aga Khan, and Prince Aly Muhammad Aga Khan. Architects and designers in attendance included Henry N. Cobb, Peter Eisenman, Robert A.M. Stern, Rafael Viñoly, Amale Andraos, Annabelle Selldorf, Craig Dykers, Mohsen Mostafavi, and Tod Williams. Other attendees included sociologist Richard Sennett, photographer Iwan Baan, and critic and historian Kenneth Frampton. Renata Holod, Hasan-Uddin Khan, and Farrokh Derakhshani, the previous and current directors of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture also attended.


NOTES

**His Highness the Aga Khan**, the 49th hereditary Imam (Spiritual Leader) of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims, became Imam in 1957 at the age of 20. The Aga Khan provides spiritual guidance to a community of 15 million living in some 25 countries, mainly in South and Central Asia, Africa and the Middle East, as well as in North America and Western Europe. As Spiritual Leader of the Ismaili Muslims, the Aga Khan has emphasized the view of Islam as a thinking, spiritual faith, one that teaches compassion and tolerance and that upholds the dignity of human beings.

The **Aga Khan Award for Architecture** is part of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), which has a wide range of activities aimed at the preservation and promotion of the material and spiritual heritage of Muslim societies. As the cultural agency of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), the Trust for Culture leverages cultural heritage as a means of supporting and catalyzing development and improving the quality of life in communities in which Muslims have a significant presence. Its programs include the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme (HCP), which works to revitalize historic cities in the Muslim world, both culturally and socioeconomically. Over the last decade, it has been engaged in the rehabilitation of historic areas in Cairo, Kabul, Herat, Aleppo, Delhi, Zanzibar, Mostar, northern Pakistan, Timbuktu and Mopti. The Aga Khan Music Initiative (AKMI) is an interregional music and arts education program with worldwide performance, outreach, mentoring, and artistic production activities. The Aga Khan Museum in Toronto presents an overview of the artistic, intellectual and scientific contributions that Muslim civilizations have made to world heritage. The Trust also supports the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), as well as [www.ArchNet.org](http://www.ArchNet.org), a major online resource on Islamic architecture.
His Highness the Aga Khan is founder and Chairman of the *Aga Khan Development Network* (AKDN) which is a group of private development agencies working to empower communities and individuals, often in disadvantaged circumstances, to improve living conditions and opportunities, especially in Central and South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. AKDN agencies work for the common good of all citizens, regardless of their gender, origin or religion. Its underlying impulse is the ethic of compassion for the vulnerable in society.

For all press queries regarding the Aga Khan Award for Architecture or the Aga Khan Development Network, contact Sam Pickens at +41 22 909 7200 or info@akdn.org

The *Architectural League* nurtures excellence in architecture, design and urbanism, and stimulates thinking and debate about the critical design and building issues of our time. League live events, digital media, publications, installations, and exhibitions present important work and ideas to inspire and help shape the path to a better future. The League encourages the development of talented younger architects and designers through competitions, commissions, and travel grants. In addition, the League creates opportunities to explore solutions to problems in the built environment, through design studies and commissioned work, and pursues important areas of inquiry to help support the contribution of architecture to the common good, through research and sustained attention to selected topics. Current projects include work on architecture, climate change, and our economic future, and an interconnected set of initiatives focusing on housing in New York City. The League’s online magazine, Urban Omnibus, spotlights innovative and exemplary ways of interpreting and intervening in the urban environment.

www.archleague.org www.urbanomnibus.net

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