The Aga Khan deplores devastation in Syria, calls for islands of stability

London, United Kingdom, 4 February 2016 - His Highness the Aga Khan today called for the establishment of ‘islands of stability’ in war-ravaged Syria that could provide areas of relative safety in the midst of conflict.

“We seek to create ‘islands of stability’, where there is public consensus, in the face of war. It is my conviction that ‘islands of stability’ can be replicated wherever security permits. Investing in them will help to prevent displacement of people and anchor communities that would otherwise flee as refugees,” he said.

The Imam (Spiritual Leader) of the Shia Ismaili Muslims made the remarks in London at an international pledging conference devoted to Syria.

“I am deeply distressed over the indiscriminate and widespread devastation of life and property, including that of irreplaceable cultural assets which are the manifestation of Syria’s stunningly rich pluralistic history,” he said.

He pledged that the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), of which he is founder and Chairman, will expand its activities in Syria by contributing US$ 200 million over the next four years. The Aga Khan noted that AKDN has already dedicated US$ 50 million to projects in Syria since the conflict began.

“Our goal is peace, stability and reconstruction,” he said.

The Aga Khan said his network has adopted a dual approach in Syria by fostering civil society and at the same time investing in communities by supporting agriculture, income generation, schools and hospitals.

“We aim to meet the urgent needs of the present, but where also possible to protect and strengthen the foundations for the future,” he said. “Our goal is to sustain hope.”

The Imam of the Ismaili community and AKDN agencies are fully engaged in the peace process under the United Nations leadership and committed to helping build a Syria that “continues to respect pluralism, remains secular, and embarks on a political process led by Syrians”.

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Founded by His Highness the Aga Khan, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a group of private, international, non-denominational agencies working to improve living conditions and opportunities for people in specific regions of the developing world. The Network’s organisations have individual mandates that range from healthcare (through over 200 health facilities including 13 hospitals) and education (with over 200 schools) to architecture, rural development, the built environment and the promotion of private-sector enterprise. Together, they work towards a common goal – to build institutions and programmes that can respond to the challenges of social, economic and cultural change on an on-going basis. AKDN works in 30 countries around the world, employing approximately 80,000 people, the majority of whom are based in developing countries. The AKDN’s annual budget for non-profit development is approximately US$ 625 million. AKDN agencies conduct their programmes without regard to faith, origin or gender.

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