

Firoz Rasul
Remarks at the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding
between AKU and the Universidade NOVA de Lisboa
Lisbon, Portugal, 13 June 2019

Professor João Sàágua, Rector of the Universidade NOVA de Lisboa,
Aga Khan University Trustee Professor Antonio Rendas, Representative of the Aga Khan Development Network and the Ismaili Imamat,
Mr Nazim Ahmad,
Leaders, faculty, and staff of NOVA and Aga Khan University,
Distinguished guests,



Partnerships between institutions, like friendships between individuals, are built on shared values. And there can be no doubt that the Aga Khan University and the Universidade NOVA de Lisboa share important values.

Let me offer just one example: the mottos of our two universities. NOVA’s motto is taken from the New Testament: “Every city divided against itself shall not stand.” That of AKU, which you will find inscribed in the University’s seal, is taken from the Qur’an. It urges us: “Be not divided among yourselves...for God joined your hearts in love.”

Is that not remarkable? Here we have two universities, separated by 9,000 kilometres, citing two different holy scriptures to express their deepest values – and choosing verses that articulate an identical desire for unity.

Moreover, we both act upon these mottos in a similar fashion. We see them as a summons to reach across borders and boundaries to form partnerships and advance knowledge.

AKU and NOVA are also lucky to share a great friend: Professor Antonio Rendas, former Rector of NOVA, and a member of AKU’s Board of Trustees. Thank you, Trustee Professor Rendas, for everything you have done to bring our institutions together and make the signing of this agreement possible.

I know I speak for everyone at AKU when I say: We are excited about this partnership. We believe it is full of promise, and we are eager to see it succeed, expand, and endure.

One reason for our enthusiasm is that our collaboration is off to a strong start. We have gathered an exceptional group of scientists and scholars for today’s inaugural Symposium on Stem Cell Science, Regenerative Medicine, Ethics, and Society. Our discussions are sure to stimulate fresh thinking. And they are sure to fuel further conversations about how AKU and NOVA can learn from one another and contribute to the progress of this extraordinarily important area of scientific inquiry.

As you know, AKU is an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network. The partnership between NOVA and AKU is part of the Network’s larger commitment to Portugal – a commitment that was

sealed by the signing of the agreement between the Ismaili Imam and the Portuguese Republic to establish the Seat, or Diwan, of the Imam in Portugal.

As AKU's founder and Chancellor, His Highness the Aga Khan, who is the Imam of the Ismaili Muslims, said in accepting an honorary doctorate from NOVA: "We hold an enduring affinity for Portugal and its institutions, its history, and its people."

The signing of this agreement is yet another expression of that affinity, and its power to bring people together to pursue knowledge, improve quality of life around the world, and enhance understanding of the value of pluralism.

Thank you.

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