

**Speech by M. Sh. Shaimiev, State Counsellor of the Republic of Tatarstan, at the Aga Khan Award for Architecture 2019 Ceremony
Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan, Russian Federation
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Your Highness, esteemed Prince Karim Aga Khan
Distinguished participants of the ceremony
Dear friends

The capital of Tatarstan is hosting the ceremony of the world famous Aga Khan Award for Architecture, aimed at preservation and protection of historical monuments and landscape architecture. It is truly a landmark event for all of us.



First of all, please allow me to express my deepest gratitude on behalf of the President of the Republic of Tatarstan Rustam Minnikhanov and myself personally for the recognition given to the programme for the development of public spaces implemented by the Republic and the honour of hosting this ceremony in Kazan. Thank you very much.

The sustainably developing multinational Tatarstan is increasingly frequently becoming the host for large international forums held in the Russian Federation. This trend we believe is evidence of the fact that we are pursuing the right course of transformations taking place in the Republic for the benefit of the welfare of the people.

We build on the rich historical and cultural heritage of our people and their contribution to the common heritage of all mankind, and we proclaim it loudly. We pay special attention to the preservation of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional peace and harmony, the revival of spirituality. The Muslim shrines of the ancient Bolgar, the Orthodox sites of the island-town of Sviyazhsk, and the Kazan Kremlin are equally valuable and important for us. These three historical sites are inscribed onto the UNESCO World Heritage List. This work, as I have repeatedly stated, is Republic-wide done whole-heartedly “from soul to soul”.

Taking advantage of the fact that at tonight’s ceremony we have the pleasure of the company of the former UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova and the Head of Rosstrudnichestvo, the former Permanent Representative of Russia to UNESCO, Eleanora Mitrofanova, I would like to thank them on behalf of the people of Tatarstan for their fruitful cooperation in reviving this historical heritage. Thank you very much. Today we also share constructive understanding with the new leadership of UNESCO and its institutions.

I want to note that the Republic “Revival” Foundation, of which I chair the Board of Trustees, this year completed a nine-year (2010-2018) project on the revival of historical monuments of the ancient city of Bolgar and the island-town of Sviyazhsk. Most recently, we embarked on a project to create multilingual educational complexes where children will be educated in three languages: Russian, Tatar and English.

We are very pleased to know that you, Your Highness, as a public figure and person who has founded many educational institutions around the world, feel strongly about these problems. Once you said: “We live in a knowledge society today where access to good quality education and research leads to sustainable development.” It is impossible to disagree with this. We fully share this thought. Moreover, you are implementing the largest charitable, educational and humanitarian projects, support proactive, creative people, regardless of nationality or

confession. Your peacekeeping mission, your commitment to bringing civilisations closer and achieving unity in diversity are consonant with our goals, especially to mine, as the UNESCO Special Envoy for Intercultural Dialogue. The same ideas were highlighted during the high-profile and much publicised Kazan Forum, which we held in September last year.

Many projects implemented in Tatarstan are aimed at addressing the most relevant life problems of the population. These are the programmes focused on eradicating the problem of dilapidated housing, continuous gasification and IT development in the settlements and villages of the Republic, construction of roads and many other initiatives. When we travelled by helicopter in Bolgar yesterday, you could see what I am talking about now. All of the settlements, even the most remote, have access to gas and roads are under construction.

The 2015 initiative of the President of Tatarstan Rustam Minnikhanov to implement the Programme for the Development of Public Spaces became a valuable continuation of our aspirations. Now there are beautiful parks and squares in all major cities and most regions of the Republic. These are the places where everyone will find something to their liking, where the people would feel comfortable and safe.

It is a rather challenging and important work, which cannot be done without professionals. Therefore, we conduct ongoing training of specialists, work with local craftsmen, and businesses, which allows us to use resources more efficiently, develop the local economy and create new jobs. All this is done by a young ambitious team that works for the benefit of the Tatarstan people - and they feel it.

A lot has been accomplished over the period of five years. More than 330 embankments, boulevards, parks and squares were built, another 60 sites will be commissioned soon. Development of comfortable public spaces is, above all, our concern and care for people. It breeds love and respect for the native land.

Dear participants of the ceremony,

It is a great honour and pleasure for us to receive the Aga Khan Award for Architecture along with five other important projects from Bangladesh, Palestine, the United Arab Emirates, Senegal and Bahrain. We congratulate you from the bottom of our hearts for this achievement.

It gives us confidence that we are following the right path, and inspires us to develop. Currently, a new three-year project on landscaping the grounds around blocks of flats is being launched in the Republic, so that they also could become an oasis of cosiness and comfort, something that we lack in the metropolitan areas. We will invest about 50 billion rubbles for these purposes over the coming few years. It was announced during the successful election campaign. People made their opinion on how the project should be realised. It is the first time that we are engaging in a social project such as this.

Your Highness, we regard this Award as a high assessment of all the multifaceted activities carried out in the Republic in the interests of the people. Thank you very much! Bik zur rəkhmət!

In conclusion, I want to say that we are open for cooperation with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. At present, scientists from the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan and the Kazan Federal University are actively engaged in the scientific study of the Great Silk Road and Great Volga Route. Since the early 2000s, scientific conferences, seminars and round tables have been held on this topic. The theme of the Great Silk Road is also relevant for Tatarstan.

Scientists have determined that the Volga, Caucasus and Siberian corridors are most important for the Russian Federation and we started active collaboration with the countries of Central Asia - Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. In 2018, our expert representative participated and made a presentation at the 5th meeting of the Coordinating Committee of the countries participating in the UNESCO Great Silk Road cross-border nomination, which brings together more than twelve countries. By the end of this year, a meeting of the 6th Coordinating Committee is scheduled in Iran.

Given the fact that Tatarstan has highly qualified specialists and scholars, recognised experts of UNESCO institutes, Your Highness, we could take part in the joint work on the development of a project to study specific corridors of the Great Silk Road. I hope that we will find common ground in the implementation of a number of other projects aimed at realising our common noble goals.

Yesterday in Bolgar, we discussed how we could use your great knowledge of architecture. I would say that you very wisely interpreted the meaning of modern architecture in conjunction with nature, landscaping and the environment, so as to serve the needs of humankind. That is why the meeting with you and your wonderful team encourages us to seek ways to collaborate on great new projects. Most importantly, as we say, develop and prosper.

Thank you to all.

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