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Press Release

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### **Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu and Aga Khan inaugurate Sunder Nursery - New Delhi's 90-acre City Park**



**New Delhi, India, 21 February 2018** – Sunder Nursery, a new 90-acre (36 hectare) city park in New Delhi, was officially inaugurated today by Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, Vice President of India, and His Highness the Aga Khan, 49<sup>th</sup> hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims and founder and Chairman of the Aga Khan Development Network.

Speaking at the ceremony, Vice President Shri Venkaiah Naidu expressed appreciation for the contributions made by the institutions of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), under His Highness' leadership. Calling it “an important day for the historic city of Delhi,” the Vice President said the Sunder Nursery project was a model of public private partnership, combining the elements of “Nature, culture and the future” as a “great addition to the capital.”

The inauguration ceremony on the grounds of Sunder Nursery was attended by senior government officials, ambassadors and foreign diplomats, as well as leaders of civil society organisations and residents from the surrounding neighbourhood.

“These projects were designed to honour the past - while also serving the future,” said the Aga Khan addressing the gathering. “And it is with the future in mind that we now dedicate the Sunder Nursery as one of the world’s great public parks - open to all for recreation, for contemplation, for education, and for inspiration.”

The Sunder Nursery project, the Aga Khan added, was an example of the importance of open, green spaces as part of a healthy urban landscape, with aesthetic, recreational and economic potential, as a catalyst for tourism, science, education, sustainable community development and sport.

Once used as a nursery by the British, the Sunder Nursery has been transformed over the last decade into a city park for the people of Delhi by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Central Public Works Department, the Archaeological Survey of India, the South Delhi Municipal Corporation and the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation. Landscape works at Sunder Nursery have been supported by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.

The Sunder Nursey Project has been part of a highly-effective public private partnership, that has demonstrated the highest standards of heritage conservation and urban revitalisation of

historic spaces, making some of India's most valuable cultural assets, upgrading the urban fabric and improving economic opportunity for disadvantaged communities in surrounding areas. Learnings from this endeavour, assets such as this one, are already informing other projects at important historic sites in India and around the world.

Over 400 truckloads of construction rubble were removed and 20,000 saplings planted. 15 monuments have been conserved by the AKTC at Sunder Nursery, drawing attention to a unique ensemble of 16<sup>th</sup> Century garden tombs, a number of which have received World Heritage designation from UNESCO.

Having served as a plant nursery for 100 years, Sunder Nursery is now Delhi's newest botanical garden and the city's first arboretum, with almost 300 tree species (the largest number found in any of Delhi's parks). A 20-acre micro-habitat zone is expected to be an important education facility and attract many of the 500,000 school children who each year visit the adjoining Humayun's Tomb, also restored by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture.

Designed by the renowned landscape architect, the late Professor M. Shaheer, the new city park encompasses formal gardens and informal settings for families to enjoy, including water features, ponds and lakes, nursery beds, intimate sunken gardens, a flower showcase, rose garden, orchards, walking paths, seating and pavilions. A sunken amphitheatre has been created to hold cultural events and festivals celebrating local traditions. A facilities wing will include rooms for lectures and film screenings, food kiosks, a souvenir shop and multi-purpose halls for training programmes.

The grand central vista, which is over 500 metres long, follows the path of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Grand Trunk Road, connecting the entrance zone of the Humayun's Tomb World Heritage Site with the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Azimganj Serai to the north.

The creation of new green spaces and botanical gardens at Sunder Nursery will constitute a significant improvement in people's living conditions and the quality of their environment. The new leisure spaces and meeting places are expected to become an attraction for all area residents as well as visitors, becoming a cultural space that will contribute to economic and social development.

The Sunder Nursery is part of over a decade of pioneering cultural revitalisation and socioeconomic urban development projects undertaken by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture across the 300 acres of project area, including the Humayun's Tomb. The environmental and conservation efforts are coupled with a major socioeconomic effort aimed at improving the quality of life for the residents of neighbouring Nizamuddin Basti, by improving building standards, creating economic opportunities, and providing education, vocational training, health, and sanitation infrastructure. These features are a hallmark of the AKDN's cultural development projects in countries across the developing world and draw upon the Aga Khan's conviction that culture and development are inextricably linked, with cultural legacies - appropriately rehabilitated or reconstructed- having the potential to become powerful catalysts for change and for alleviating poverty.

The Aga Khan is in the country on a 10-day official visit at the invitation of the Government, on the occasion of his Diamond Jubilee – commemorating 60 years as Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims. He acceded to the Imamate (the institution of hereditary spiritual leadership) in 1957 at the age of 20 years.

Earlier in the day, the Aga Khan met with Vice President Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu who hosted a lunch in his honour. Later this evening the Aga Khan is scheduled to meet with Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. During his stay he is also expected to meet with President of India Honourable Shri Ram Nath Kovind as well as the Chief Minister of Gujarat, the Governor of Gujarat, Deputy Chief Minister of Telangana, and the Chief Minister of Maharashtra and the Governor of Maharashtra.

These meetings are an opportunity to review the longstanding partnership between India and the Ismaili Imamate and to discuss how the institutions of the AKDN will continue to serve the country in years to come, improving opportunities and effecting sustainable improvement in the quality of life of vulnerable populations of all faiths and backgrounds.

## **NOTES**

The *Ismaili Imamate* and the *Aga Khan Development Network* (AKDN) have a long and historic relationship with India. The first Aga Khan School in Mundra, Gujarat was established by the Aga Khan's grandfather, Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, in 1905.

Today, AKDN institutions work in close partnership with governments and communities to address a broad spectrum of development priorities in the country, including cultural revitalisation, education, health care, drinking water and sanitation, agriculture and the environment, rural development and access to finance for poor communities.

These initiatives include rural support programmes that have benefitted over 1.5 million people of all faiths and backgrounds, in over 2,500 villages, the creation of 6,600 community institutions, urban and rural education programmes working with over 400 schools, a comprehensive sanitation initiative in six states, the Aga Khan Academy in Hyderabad, and a 162-bed multi-specialty acute care hospital in Mumbai. AKDN institutions in India have been widely recognised for their work, which is frequently replicated by governmental institutions as well as other development organisations.

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