His Highness the Aga Khan is the 49th Imam (spiritual leader) of the Shi’á Ismaili Muslims. The Ismaili Imamat represents the succession of Imams since the time, and in the progeny, of Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him and his progeny). His Highness has been deeply engaged with the development of countries around the world for over 60 years through the work of the institutions he has created to enhance learning, build capacity and improve the quality of life of people around the world.

The Aga Khan has dedicated his efforts over six decades to improving the quality of life of the most vulnerable in society, while emphasising the view of Islam as a thinking, spiritual faith: one that teaches compassion, tolerance and upholds human dignity.

The Muslim belief in the fusion of faith and world underlines the contemporary endeavour of the Ismaili Imamat to carry forward the social conscience of Islam through the action of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). The Network’s organisations work towards a common goal – to build institutions and programmes that can respond to the challenges of social, economic, and cultural change on an ongoing basis, with a strong emphasis on education.

The title “His Highness” was bestowed by Her Majesty the Queen in 1957 the year of his accession as hereditary leader of the Shi’a Ismaili Muslims. In 2004, he was appointed Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. These are acknowledgements of the historic linkages between the Ismaili Imamat and the British Monarchy, and longstanding connections between the Ismaili Community, the institutions of the AKDN and the United Kingdom.
July 2017 marked the start of the Diamond Jubilee, or 60th anniversary, of the Aga Khan's spiritual leadership of the Ismaili community. The Ismaili Muslims are a global, multi-ethnic community whose members, comprising a wide diversity of cultures, languages and nationalities, live in Central Asia, the Middle East, South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and North America. Throughout the history of the Ismaili Imamat, jubilees have been utilised as occasions to create institutions and initiatives to improve the quality of life of the community and those amongst whom they live.

During his Diamond Jubilee visit to the United Kingdom, His Highness will inaugurate the Aga Khan Centre, a place for education, knowledge, cultural exchange and insight into Muslim civilisations. It will serve as the new UK home to a number of global organisations founded by His Highness, including The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS), the Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (AKU-ISM), and the Aga Khan Foundation (UK). Together the organisations housed at the building work to bridge the gap in understanding about Muslim history and cultures.

The Aga Khan Centre will join the Ismaili Centre in London as an ambassadorial building of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) and the institutions of the Ismaili Imamat in the United Kingdom.

The Ismaili Centre, located in South Kensington in London’s Cultural Quarter, was the first of the global family of Ismaili Centres. The building was inaugurated in 1985 by His Highness, together with the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. The Ismaili Centre will continue to bring people together around arts, culture, and thoughtful debate as part of its ongoing programmes serving the Ismaili community, its neighbours and friends.