

Rowe: The Aga Khan's visit to Houston reminds us that a pluralist society begins in the classroom

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By Gabriella Rowe

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Photo: Altaf Qadri, STF / Associated Press

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Caption

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Aga Khan, right, spiritual head of Ismaili Muslims and the founder Chairman of Aga Khan Development Network stands with Indian Vice President Venkiah Naidu, center, and Lieutenant Governor of Delhi Anil Baijal as they pose for photos after arriving for the inauguration of Sunder Nursery in New Delhi, India, Wednesday, Feb. 21, 2018. Sunder Nursery was founded over 100 years ago by British colonists to grow experimental plants, has been revamped by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in collaboration with the Central Public Works Department, Archaeological Survey of India and other agencies to create a 90-acre city park. [less](#)

Aga Khan, right, spiritual head of Ismaili Muslims and the founder Chairman of Aga Khan Development Network stands with Indian Vice President Venkiah Naidu, center, and Lieutenant Governor of Delhi Anil Baijal... [more](#)

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His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, the 49th Imam of the Ismaili Muslims, speaks during an interview with Bloomberg News in Edinburgh, Scotland on Wednesday, October 5, 2005. The 68-year-old spiritual leader received the Andrew Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy on Oct, 4, 2005. The Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development manages a \$1.5 billion portfolio of companies ranging from Afghan mobile phone company Roshan to Kenyan publisher Nation Media Group. [less](#)

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His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan IV, the 49th Imam of the Ismaili Muslims, speaks during a 2005 interview with Bloomberg News in Edinburgh, Scotland.

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Photo: MIKE WILKINSON / BLOOMBERG NEWS

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Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper stands for a photo with His Highness the Aga Khan, the 49th hereditary Imam of the Ismaili Muslims, at the opening of the Ismaili Center Toronto and the Aga Khan Museum (background) in Toronto on Sept. 12, 2014. [less](#)

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper stands for a photo with His Highness the Aga Khan, the 49th hereditary Imam of the Ismaili Muslims, at the opening of the Ismaili Center Toronto and the Aga Khan Museum... [more](#)

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Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, right, speaks as he walks with the Spiritual leader of the Shiite Muslim Ismaili sect Karim Aga Khan upon his arrival in Syrian capital Damascus on Aug. 24, 2008. The Aga Khan is the Chairman of Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), the developmental projects launched by Aga Khan network in Syria. The AKDN is a group of development agencies with mandates ranging from health and education to architecture, culture, microfinance, rural development, disaster reduction, the promotion of private-sector enterprise and the revitalization of historic cities. [less](#)

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, right, speaks as he walks with the Spiritual leader of the Shiite Muslim Ismaili sect Karim Aga Khan upon his arrival in Syrian capital Damascus on Aug. 24, 2008. The Aga Khan... [more](#)

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Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and The Aga Khan share a smile at a dinner at Buckingham Palace, London, to mark the Aga Khan's Golden Jubilee, July 7, 2008.

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Photo: Dominic Lipinski, SUB / AP

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Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (R) talks with the Imam (Spiritual Leader) of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims, Aga Khan, during their meeting in New Delhi on May 12, 2008.

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Photo: PEDRO UGARTE, Staff / AFP/Getty Images

Prince Karim Aga Khan, right, the spiritual leader of Ismaili Muslims, speaks with the Norwegian premier Jens Stoltenberg (L) during a 2005 meeting in Islamabad.

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Photo: IRFAN NAEEM, Stringer / AFP/Getty Images

In our increasingly globalized world, it is a pluralist cosmopolitan society that thrives. This is a society that recognizes and affirms diversity from within, and not only accepts those differences, but seeks to understand and learn from them.

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This year marks His Highness the Aga Khan's Diamond Jubilee, his 60 years as the 49th hereditary Imam (spiritual leader) of the world's Ismaili Muslims. With the Aga Khan's visit to Houston this week — one of the most diverse cities in America — to celebrate this milestone, the Ismaili community here is using the opportunity to reflect on his commitment to faith, pluralism and improved quality of life across the world. A particular focus of his is bringing pluralism — a capacity to see those from different backgrounds as equals — into the classroom.

As Head of School at The Village School in Houston, I place the highest value on diversity. Our student body represents six continents and more than 60 countries. We celebrate the diversity of our international community every day.

This pluralistic outlook is not an in-born skill — it must be learned through education.

Translator

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Editorials

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Classrooms must aim to influence how students interact with others and choose to contribute to the world. Through open and deliberate collaboration and dialogue with people from varied cultures, languages and values, students should be encouraged and expected to make a positive impact on those around them. Working and contributing on a global scale was once far-fetched. With today's technology, making a difference in the world has become simpler and much more practical.

Technology and globalization is moving at a rapid pace — and education must keep up. A shift in attitude toward tolerance and openness, the ability to accept pluralistic views, and a well-rounded, unbiased understanding of diverse social environments must be considered

in education. Whether learning about a different cultures holidays or encouraging students to volunteer and get involved with their own community, pluralistic values should have an essential role in our educational environments.

If we're not teaching this in school (and home and at work), as the Aga Khan has said, "The inability of human society to recognize pluralism as a fundamental value constitutes a serious danger for our future."

EDITORIAL: As Ramadan ends, so should ugly rhetoric about Muslims

We all have a responsibility to ensure our children are well prepared to lead a successful and purposeful life as engaged world citizens.

It is a lesson I learned in person last summer while visiting The Ismaili Centre in London with Mayor Sylvester Turner and a group of Houston leaders assembled by the Greater Houston Partnership.

As an educator in Houston, I welcome the Ismaili community's effort to further progress the humanitarian works of the Aga Khan in their local communities — as well as the global community through the Aga Khan Development Network and its Aga Khan Academies.

Those schools, which currently serve India, Kenya and Mozambique, aim to develop future leaders from all backgrounds with the skills and knowledge to support positive development in their societies and beyond. Pluralism is taught there — the kind of pluralism that Houstonians learn every day in our own schools.

Danish Jamal, a graduate from the Aga Khan Academies, said, "We were taught to be more open-minded and less judgmental of others... We learned and experienced cultures of people across the worlds... I can live, attend college and work in almost any country."

Deliberately embedding diversity into school is a necessity to help our students confront the new and complex realities of living and thriving in a global society. It's an honor to have the Aga Khan in Houston this week to share his and the Ismaili community's contributions and commitment to pluralism in this diverse city of ours and well beyond it.

Rowe is the head of school for The Village School, part of Nord Anglia Education.