PRESS RELEASE

Aga Khan Academy Mombasa student, Ziyaan Virji, addressing youth at TechFest 2.0 on his mission to empower women through his organization, Affordable and Accessible Sanitation for Women (AASW).
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Student at Aga Khan Academy in Kenya receives Diana Award

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Mombasa, Kenya, 13 August 2019 - Ziyaan Virji, 17, a student at the Aga Khan Academy in Mombasa, Kenya, has received the Diana Award for going above and beyond his everyday life to create and sustain positive

change. The Diana Award, which is given in memory of Princess Diana, is considered one of the highest accolades for social action or humanitarian efforts that a young person can receive.

Mr. Virji received the Award for launching Affordable and Accessible Sanitation for Women (AASW), which has helped almost 300 girls to acquire access to menstrual hygiene across six different countries. Countries includes Kenya, Tanzania, Pakistan, India, Nigeria and the UAE. In the next 12 months, AASW aims to continue expanding to provide over 1,000 girls with access to sanitation.

The story of the creation of AASW starts in 2017. While working on his "Personal Project" – an in-depth research-based project – for his International Baccalaureate studies at the Academy, Ziyaan was surprised to learn that 500 million girls across the world do not have access to the necessary menstrual health resources they require.

In response, and to ensure the sustainability of his project beyond academics, he launched AASW. AASW is now a voluntary youth initiative that is comprised of high school students between the ages of 13-18. Run with support from staff at the Academy, AASW works with local organisations to produce and distribute reusable sanitary packages and equip girls with the necessary skills to give themselves and their communities access to menstrual hygiene.

AASW has been working in close collaboration with community partners Tunaweza Women with Disabilities to produce and distribute sanitary packages that are washable (therefore reusable), cost effective, environmentally friendly and embarrassment-free. These packages last for up to three years, are 100% biodegradable and cost between US$ 3 to US$ 5. Additionally, the pads are made from colourful African fabric (leso/kitenge) with a removable felt lining, so they do not look like a typical menstruation product. In the longer term, AASW aims to create entrepreneurial opportunities to empower girls to take themselves out of the vicious poverty and help the rest of their community to access menstrual hygiene.

Ziyaan believes that "period poverty" should be a fight that all of humanity takes on because "no one would be alive if not for the reproductive cycle". The initiative also provides educational sessions for both boys and girls in order to break the social stigma surrounding menstruation. AASW has been hosting such events both at the Academy and at Unity School in Bombolulu, which is the Academy's main partner school. AASW also hosts sessions between the women at Tunaweza and the girls at Unity School so they can learn how to stitch their own reusable pads. In this way, the girls can be empowered to support other young women and girls in the community, while also providing an entrepreneurial avenue.

Upon receiving the award, Ziyaan commented: "I am truly honoured to be a recipient of this prestigious International Award and to be recognised for my work in the legacy of Princess Diana. I would like to thank my family, my close friends, my mentors and most importantly my school for their continuous support and guidance in helping me find and achieve my purpose: to help give girls access to menstrual hygiene around the world."

Ziyaan is a student of the Aga Khan Academy Mombasa, where he is now in his final year of the International Baccalaureate Diploma programme. In a previous interview, Ziyaan expressed that, "The Academy has taught me a lot about the whole process of service, especially the idea of the service cycle and thinking sustainably when reaching out to communities. This knowledge guided me in creating my unique model of approach".

Pluralism, Ethics and Civil Society are some of the unique elements woven into the Academies' curriculum, which is designed to develop students into the leaders of tomorrow. The hope is that students develop an attitude of global citizenship and a desire to improve the quality of life of people amongst whom they live.

NOTES

The *Diana Award* was established 20 years ago and is given to inspirational young people from across the United Kingdom and around the world. The award was founded in memory of Diana, Princess of Wales and inspired by her belief that young people can change the world. The award is supported by her sons, The Duke of Cambridge and The Duke of Sussex. Nominees of the award must be aged between 9-25 and have been carrying out their activities for at least 12 months. They are judged on four criteria, namely vision, social impact, youth led, service journey and inspiring others.

The *Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa*, a programme of the Aga Khan Development Network, is the first of a network of 18 planned academies to be established across Africa, Europe, South and Central Asia, and the Middle East. Each is designed to provide a world-class education to exceptional students who possess strong leadership potential. Admission to the Academy is based on merit, and financial aid is available to ensure access for students with demonstrated need. Pluralism is a core value of the educational programme at the Aga Khan Academy, whose student body reflects the full diversity of East Africa and includes students from all socio-economic backgrounds. The Aga Khan Academy Mombasa is an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School, offering an IB curriculum that is locally rooted and globally relevant. Academy graduates consistently earn places and scholarships at the world's top universities. In December 2018, the Academy marked 15 years since its founding. For further information on the Academy, visit: http://www.agakhanacademies.org/mombasa