



DIWAN OF THE ISMAILI IMAMAT

His Highness the Aga Khan IV and the UK

Overview

His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan IV and his family have close ties to the UK. There are longstanding links between the Ismaili Imam and the British Monarchy, and between the Ismaili community and the Commonwealth.

Prince Karim's mother was British-born Joan Yarde-Buller, the eldest of six children born to John Yarde-Buller, 3rd Baron Churston, the aide-de-camp to the Viceroy of India, and Denise Orme, a former music hall singer. His first wife, Sarah Frances Croker-Poole, who assumed the Muslim name Begum Salimah Aga Khan, was born in India and was one of the last generation of debutantes to be presented to the Queen in 1958.

Post the Second World War, with the subsequent demise of colonial rule, Ismailis in the Commonwealth, like others in the former British Empire, began to migrate, seeking new homes and livelihoods in countries which offered peace, stability and respect for individual freedom. A growing number settled in the UK, Europe, and North America.

Over the next thirty years the Ismaili community in London and in other parts of the UK expanded and flourished. The first purpose-built Ismaili Centre, located in South Kensington, London, and part of a global network of six Ismaili Centres, was established by His Highness the Aga Khan in 1983. It was built to meet the social, cultural, and religious needs of an established and growing community.

The institutions of the Ismaili Imam in the UK include the Aga Khan Foundation UK, The Institute of Ismaili Studies, the Aga Khan University, and the Aga Khan Library, all of which are housed in the Aga Khan Centre at Kings Cross.

The history of thoroughbred horse racing and breeding activities of the Aga Khan family can be traced back to the 19th century. His Highness was one of the most prolific thoroughbred horse owner and breeders in the UK, Ireland, and France from the 1960s to the 1990s, before choosing to focus his activities on the latter two countries after the turn of the millennium. To date, he has won 20 owners' championships and 15 breeders' championships in Europe including five Epsom Derby wins.



Relationship with the British Monarchy

The Ismaili Imamate and the British Monarchy are both institutions anchored in history and tradition, and, through their holders-of-office, they engage with and respond to the challenges of the modern world.

Since the time of the 46th hereditary Imam, Aga Khan I (1804-1881), there has been a long relationship of respect with the British monarchy which continued to be fostered and strengthened by later generations. Before settling in Bombay in 1845, the first Aga Khan spent time in Afghanistan and Sindh, where he and his retinue rendered his services to the British Crown. In gratitude, Queen Victoria honoured the Aga Khan with the title of His Highness.

Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III (1877-1957), served on His Majesty King George V's Privy Council in 1934, and received several honours in recognition of his public service, from Queen Victoria, King Edward VII and King George V. In 1955, Aga Khan III was appointed to the Order of the Grand Cross of St Michael and St George (GCMG) by the late Queen Elizabeth II.

Both the Ismaili Imamate and the British Monarchy are aligned in upholding values of tolerance, human dignity and service to others and exemplify this through their many global endeavours aimed at reaching populations regardless of creed or background.

- The title "His Highness" was granted to Aga Khan IV by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in 1957 following the practice of earlier British monarchs who had accorded the title to Aga Khans I, II and III.
- In 2004, His Highness Aga Khan IV was appointed Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II.
- During their official tour of Egypt in 2006, HM King Charles III and the Queen Consort, then The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, toured [Al Azhar Park](#) in Cairo, accompanied by HH Aga Khan IV.
- During the same year (2006) HM King Charles III and the Queen Consort, then The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, were also hosted by HH Aga Khan IV on a tour of Aga Khan development projects in the Northern Areas of Pakistan.
- In 2007, HM King Charles III and the Queen Consort, then The Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, were the guests of honour of His Highness at the opening of the *Spirit & Life* exhibition at the Ismaili Centre, London. The exhibition showcased the nucleus of the Islamic art collections of the future Aga Khan Museum in Toronto.
- In 2008, Queen Elizabeth II hosted dinner at Buckingham Palace in honour of His Highness on the occasion of his Golden Jubilee. She did the same at Windsor Castle in 2018 for His Highness's Diamond Jubilee. The dinners were attended by the members from both families.



- In 2018, HM King Charles III, then The Prince of Wales, officially opened the [Aga Khan Centre](#) at King's Cross. In his speech The Prince of Wales said: *"I would also just like to say a brief few words about the Ismaili community in this country, and the contribution you have made to British society over so many years. I have always had the greatest admiration for the Ismaili community's emphasis on intellectual and cultural exploration as a means of integration, and your determination to discharge your obligations as citizens of this country while maintaining your own special and distinctive traditions."* (Prince Charles, 26 June 2018).
- His Highness the Aga Khan has long supported the charitable work of The Prince's Trust. In 2019, His Highness became the Global Founding Patron of The Prince's Trust.

The AKDN, the Ismaili Imamat and the UK

For almost 50 years, [AKDN](#) agencies and institutions of the Ismaili Imamat have enjoyed fruitful partnerships with the British government, universities and many other institutions.

- AKDN has worked in close partnership with UK government development agencies for decades, first signing an Accord of Cooperation with the UK's Overseas Development agency (now the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office) in 1988.
- The UK has given more than \$230million for international development cooperation in partnership with the AKDN from 1984 to 2020.
- The [Aga Khan Foundation \(AKF\)](#) UK aims to improve quality of life, enhance self-reliance and promote pluralism in poor and marginalised communities in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.
 - Established in 1973, AKF (UK) forms strategic partnerships with a variety of institutional partners including government agencies, corporations, trusts and foundations.
 - A recent example of the partnership between AKF and the UK government is strengthening girls' education in Afghanistan. The Girls Education Challenge is one of the largest projects in FCDO's portfolio, with Save the Children, Catholic Relief Services and CARE at \$58m.
 - A [2022 agreement](#) worth £11.2 million expands AKDN and the UK Government's partnership in Afghanistan to include support for agriculture and livelihoods and access to healthcare.
 - *Illuminate* is a programme that offers aspiring UK students' (aged 15-16) insight into transformational ideas that are shaping the world today and connecting them with international development industry experts.



- In 2020 AKDN partnered with HRH Prince William as a Global Founding Alliance Partner of the Earthshot Prize, designed to find and grow solutions to repair the planet this decade.
- AKDN agencies have academic partnerships with the British Council; Cambridge Assessment International Education; the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA); Flora and Fauna International; the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine; Sheffield Hallam University; the University of Cambridge; the University of Exeter; the University College London, Institute of Education; University of London, SOAS; the University of Manchester and the University of Oxford.

Contributions to London

- His Highness the Aga Khan commissioned two unique buildings in London; [the Ismaili Centre](#) in South Kensington, London's Cultural Quarter, and the [Aga Khan Centre](#) in King's Cross, London's Knowledge Quarter.
- The [Ismaili Centre](#), situated opposite the Victoria and Albert and Natural History museums, and designed by British Architects Casson Conder Partnership, was opened in April 1985 by the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.
 - Based in London's Cultural Quarter, the Ismaili Centre, London reflects the commitment of His Highness the Aga Khan, as spiritual leader of the Ismaili Muslims, to encourage dialogue and celebrate pluralism. The Ismaili Centre is a vibrant hub in local society, sponsoring cultural initiatives such as exhibitions, lectures and other public events, for example, Exhibition Road Music Day, the Big Iftar, the Nour Festival, amongst others.
 - Other Ismaili Centres are in Vancouver, Lisbon, Dubai, Dushanbe, and Toronto. A seventh centre is being built in Houston.
 - Ismaili Centres serve as a place of gathering for Ismailis and are symbolic markers of the permanent presence and core values of the Ismaili Muslim community. Incorporating spaces for social and cultural gatherings, intellectual engagement, and reflection, as well as spiritual contemplation, they are bridges of friendship and understanding, and serve to enhance relationships among faith communities, government, and civil society.
- The [Aga Khan Centre](#) is a place of education, knowledge, cultural exchange and insight into Muslim civilisations.
 - The building is the UK home to the Aga Khan Foundation, The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS), the Aga Khan University Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (AKU-ISMC), and the Aga Khan Library, London.
 - AKU-ISMC and the IIS are academic research and higher education institutions, promoting a better understanding of Islam and producing knowledge about Muslim cultures and societies. Both focus on research,



publications, and graduate studies, encouraging innovative scholarship in applying the approaches of the humanities and social sciences to the study of Muslim cultures. These institutions of learning offer important pathways for a more pluralist and peaceful world.

- AKU-ISMC offers graduate degrees in cooperation with the School of Oriental and Asian Studies (SOAS) and Columbia University, and the IIS offers graduate degrees in cooperation with SOAS and University College London, Institute of Education (UCL, IoE).
- The design of the Aga Khan Centre represents the values of openness, dialogue and respect for different viewpoints (pluralism). The architecture incorporates a collection of gardens, courtyards and terraces that provide an insight into the diversity and influence of Islamic landscape design around the world and through history. The Islamic Gardens are open to the public at select times.
- The building was designed by Pritzker Prize winner Fumihiko Maki, one of Japan's most distinguished contemporary architects, and is the third project Maki has worked on for His Highness

Personal interests

His Highness' passion for thorough-bred horse racing and breeding has been a [family tradition](#) for over five generations, dating back to the 19th century.

The Aga Khan Studs is a world-renowned thoroughbred racing and breeding operation owned and developed by His Highness the Aga Khan IV. The European bloodstock entity was founded in 1921 by the Aga Khan III, following the purchase of yearling fillies at the bloodstock sales. H.H. the Aga Khan IV took over the running of the operation following the death of his father, Prince Aly Khan, in 1960, continuing a great family tradition of horsemanship.

His Highness was one of the most prolific thoroughbred horse owner and breeders in the UK, Ireland, and France from the 1960s to the 1990s, before choosing to focus his activities on the latter two countries after the turn of the millennium. Today His Highness not only retains his major breeding operation in County Kildare, Ireland, but also has a strong team of horses that go into training each year with John Oxx at The Curragh and Michael Halford in Kildare Town.

His famous green and red racing silks have since been carried to victory in over [160 Group 1](#) races, including by such celebrated names as Blushing Groom, Shergar, Darshaan, Dalakhani and Zarkava. His Highness Aga Khan IV race wins include five Derby winners, four winners of the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, and a record seven winners of the Prix de Diane.

For further information see [Aga Khan Studs](#)



Distinctions, Honours and Partnerships – United Kingdom

- Global Alliance Founding Partner of the Earthshot Prize - present
- Global Founding Patron of The Prince's Trust - present
- Vice President, Royal Commonwealth Society - present
- Honorary Doctor of Divinity, University of Cambridge - 2009
- Andrew Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy - 2005
- Knight Commander of the British Empire (KBE) - 2004
- Honorary Doctor of Laws, LL.D. (honoris causa), University of Wales - 1993
- Honorary Fellowship, Royal Institute of British Architects - 1991
- Honorary Doctor of Letters, University of London - 1989

Ismailis in the UK

- The Ismaili community has had a well-established presence in the UK since the 1970's with a population of approx. 20,000 and over 30 places of worship and community gathering (*Jamatkhana*) across the British Isles.
- The community grew significantly following the political upheavals of East Africa in the 1970s, and among those who arrived were doctors, engineers, accountants, and other professional people, as well as businesspeople, predominantly of South Asian descent. With the Imam's guidance to prioritise life-long education and to integrate and contribute to society, along with the community's social governance infrastructure, Ismailis were able to settle and build constructive, new lives quickly.
- Now into their third or fourth generation, the community in the UK represents diverse cultural backgrounds. More recently the community has grown through migration from the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, and the Middle East.
- What was once an immigrant community, has now, over three generations, firmly made Britain its home, priding itself on being a community of forward minded, well-educated, and engaged citizens, contributing socially, economically, and culturally to 21st century Britain. Many Ismailis are successful entrepreneurs who have built significant businesses and others have entered professional sectors and are high achievers in their chosen fields, including academia, science and medicine, journalism, finance, law, education, arts and culture, philanthropy, and the public sector.
- Many Ismaili Muslims give their time, knowledge, and material resources within the community as well as to wider society, on a voluntary basis to improve the lives of those less fortunate.
 - Various individuals in the community volunteer through their own endeavours, for example as school governors, magistrates, running marathons for charity etc.



- Approx. 700 Ismailis participated as Games Makers during the London Olympics
- Over 2000 members of the community actively volunteer within the community's social governance structures, in boards and committees concerned with the social welfare, the health, economic status, well-being and education of the community.
- Ismaili CIVIC, a fledgling volunteering programme established in April 2020, has now partnered and collaborated with numerous local organisations including The Prince's Trust, Age UK, and FareShare, the NHS and the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea.
- Key areas of focus for Ismaili CIVIC include (but are not limited to) climate change and environmental support, youth and adult mentoring and a host of community support services such as blood drives, translation services, food provision and delivery to those in need, assisting vulnerable, needy, and elderly members of society, refugee and homeless assistance, drives to collect items such as clothing, mobile phone, computers, etc.
- In October 2021, Ismaili CIVIC UK pledged 100,000 hours of voluntary service to the British people and to date 100 projects have been completed.



Pull Quotes

“The Imam-of-the-Time also has a responsibility for improving the quality of life - the quality of worldly life - for his people, and for the people among whom the Ismailis live. It is to advance those responsibilities that so much of my attention over these sixty years has been committed not only to strengthening the Imamat’s capacities to fulfil its mandate, but also to the work of what we now call the AKDN - the Aga Khan Development Network. The AKDN includes a variety of agencies working in the fields of economic development, education, health care, and cultural enrichment. Our fundamental objective is to do whatever we can to help to improve the quality of human life.”

[Address by His Highness Aga Khan IV to the Parliament of Portugal, July 10, 2018](#)

“It is, of course, Your Highness, the remarkable leadership that you have shown over these past sixty years, which has made a reality of everything we see here today. Above all, it is Your Highness’s vision which has enabled the Aga Khan Development Network to grow into an organisation of international importance, addressing development needs across the globe, and bridging the boundaries of race and religion with your message of hope, compassion and pluralism.”

AND

“Your Highness, the extraordinary work that you have done throughout your lifetime, in the service of humanity and in the name of Islam, is as remarkable as it is invaluable. For that, you are owed the greatest debt of gratitude and I did just want to take this opportunity to thank you on behalf of us all, if I may.”

[His Majesty King Charles III, then The Prince of Wales, at the opening of the Aga Khan Centre, London, June 26, 2018](#)

“The world, especially in these difficult times, needs people of vision and goodwill like the Aga Khan. He is a living example that there is no inevitable contradiction between religion and democracy, that pluralism and diversity are possible, and that interaction of cultures enriches and empowers humanity.”

“As a global leader he continuously demonstrates that what unites us is far greater than what divides us,”

[Remarks made by Kofi Annan, UN Foundation, New York City, October 2017, before His Highness was awarded the UN Foundation’s Global Change Prize.](#)



“With the wisdom, the tolerance, and the compassion of His Highness the Aga Khan, I think we can win the battle for a better world,”

Remarks made by António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, at the UN Foundation, New York City, October 2017 when His Highness was awarded the [UN Foundation’s Global Change Prize](#).

“Our story in this country is a case study in the settlement of an immigrant community - one which originated from East Africa, the Indian subcontinent and now Central Asia. Upheavals in their native lands - wars of independence, civil wars, collapsed economies and other dislocations affected the Ismailis and millions of others around them. Today almost one third of my community in this country have been born in the United Kingdom. They have maintained their religious and cultural identity and they are well integrated into their local environment. It is a community in which over 90 per cent of the university age population participate in tertiary education... Britain has been an enabling environment. As a result, the community is now making a meaningful contribution to the economy and civic society, whilst also providing a resource to support initiatives in other parts of the world.”

[His Highness the Aga Khan, Golden Jubilee Dinner, London, 3 July 2008](#)

“Can I also just say a brief word about the Ismaili community in this country, and the contribution they make to modern British society. I can only applaud your emphasis on intellectual and cultural exploration as a means of integration, and your determination to discharge your obligations as citizens of this country without losing your own distinctive traditions. I suspect it is no coincidence that the younger members of your community have among the highest participation in tertiary education, helping to create strong role models for all young people in Britain. The reasons behind this are probably more a subject for a Doctoral thesis than a short speech. But I have no doubt that the existence of shared values is a key defining factor. These values celebrate humility, greatness of soul, honour, magnanimity and, indeed, hospitality. They form the bedrock of the excellent outreach work of the Ismaili Centre. These shared values are perhaps, the greatest of the treasures displayed here today”.

[HM King Charles III, then The Prince of Wales, opening of Spirit and Life exhibition, London, 13 July 2007](#)



“There has been an Ismaili community in this country for very many years. But I know that many members came here comparatively recently, having been uprooted from settled and successful lives in East Africa. For them, leaving East Africa must have been a sad, deeply disturbing and in some cases, terrible experience. But clearly the Ismaili community who made Britain their new home triumphed over these adversities and have found here a new sense of security and belonging. This Centre is a powerful symbol of that feeling of belonging.

And in return, Britain, like so many other parts of the world where there are Ismaili communities, benefits from the contributions that Ismailis make to society. The Ismaili community in London is self-sufficient and independent, energetic and highly talented. It contributes to society in every sort of way. And at the same time, its powerful sense of community, both spiritual and cultural, provides a firm and unchanging basis for living.”

[The Right Honourable Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom](#)
[Opening of the Ismaili Centre](#)
[London, 24 April 1985](#)

“The Aga Khan’s values of pluralism, multiculturalism, and strengthening civil society, are those we must all emulate”.

[Dr Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, presenting the Andrew Carnegie Medal of philanthropy to the Aga Khan, Edinburgh, Scotland, 14 October 2005](#)
