

Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim

His Excellency President Karume and Mrs. Karume
Honourable Deputy Chief Minister of Zanzibar
Honourable Chief Justice
Honourable Minister Mansour Himid, and I thank you for your very kind words
Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a distinct pleasure for me to be part of this great occasion - in this very special setting.

As we look to the extraordinary landmark buildings on one side of this historic site - and to the splendid seascape on the other side - and as we also look back upon the rich history of the ground on which we stand - we realize how privileged we are to be part of this place -and part of its revitalization.

Let me begin by thanking all of you who have contributed so much to the success of the Forodhani Park restoration - and the Seafront Rehabilitation Project of which it is a part. This work has been a great partnership - an example of what can be done when people come together, with a common purpose, and share their knowledge - from the public and the private sector, from the local, national and international level, from civil society and many many different professions.

This coming together of people from many backgrounds has been a central theme in the history of Zanzibar for over a thousand years - since the first Arab traders were blown this way by the monsoon winds in the 8th Century. Through the centuries, Zanzibar became one of the central crossroads of commerce and culture. Here people from all sides of the Indian Ocean came to encounter one another - in ways which were ordinary and extra ordinary, tragic and invigorating.

It is worth noting that the peoples who were drawn here were themselves men and women with pluralistic outlooks, energized by new horizons, skilled in the sciences of exploration, and engaged by cultural diversity. The culture which emerged here was thus a distinctly pluralist culture, resonating with African, Arab, Indian and European influences. It is that rich legacy which we celebrate today.

And just as Zanzibar was a significant focal point for this region of the world, so too the Seafront where we are gathered - and the place we now call Forodhani Park - has long been a focal point for Zanzibar.

In recent years, however, the intensity of the demands on this site have outgrown its capacity to meet them. What had been a place of lively interchange became a place of crippling congestion. As my brother, Prince Ayn Aga Khan said at the groundbreaking ceremony here just 18 months ago, "the balance between commercial activity and leisure had been lost." - and finding a healthy new balance became the key to making the Park, once again, the "hub and the heart" of Stone Town.

This project has given me great personal satisfaction over many years. The Aga Khan Trust for Culture began its work in Zanzibar some twenty years ago, in 1989. Working with the government, we published a Master Plan for Stone Town in 1996, and then, step by step, with the help of many partners, a major part of that plan was implemented. Local citizens were trained in traditional building techniques - and some eleven buildings were restored. The historic Grade One building known as the Old Dispensary was restored to

Grade One standards, and given a new purpose as today's Stone Town Cultural Center. The Customs House and Kelele Square were also rehabilitated, and the Serena Inn has been operating successfully on the site of the old telecom building.

I should add, however, that my interest in Zanzibar has even earlier precedents. My grandfather helped to build schools here a century ago. Our Aga Khan Development Network and its predecessor institutions have been operating hospitals and clinics here for over fifty years. Community health programmes, early childhood education, and programmes to strengthen civil society continue to be important areas of emphasis.

The accomplishments we celebrate today, then, are a part of an ongoing story - and it is a story which has counterparts in many places around the world.

In Cairo, in Damascus and Aleppo, in Delhi and Lahore, in Kabul and Bamako, in Mopti, Djenne and Timbuktu, and along the ancient Silk Route, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, through its Historic Cities Programme, has worked to restore a series of major cultural landmarks.

We undertake these projects, in part, because they can reinforce a sense of identity within proud communities, providing gateways to cultural understanding for local citizens and for visitors alike. But there is more to the matter than that. These cultural initiatives, in each case, have also been accompanied by a social and economic rationale, so that the entire project works to improve the well being of the people who live in these areas.

How does this happen? It happens when many components come together - like pieces of a complex puzzle.

To begin with, of course, it happens by attracting outside investment. But more than that, it happens when the indigenous population can be intimately involved in the work of restoration itself, and when training in restoration and conservation is provided as an integral part of the project. It happens when the restored site can become the home for a range of newly active civic and commercial institutions, and when the completed project is so attractive to visitors that it produces a flow of new income that not only sustains the site, but also improves the life of the surrounding neighbourhood.

All of this happens most successfully when people from the community are employed directly at the site - and at supporting facilities, such as the Serena Inn just down the road from here, which not only pays local taxes but also provides employment for some 120 people.

Finally, the economic and social impact of these restoration projects can be multiplied even more powerfully through the use of micro-credit. Given even a small but a sustainable source of income, local residents can leverage these new resources by borrowing through well-focused micro-credit programmes, enabling them to make further, even more ambitious plans, and to turn those plans into realities.

I am pleased to report that our own Microcredit Finance institution has just launched a new program here in Zanzibar - and is planning to extend some 1000 loans within the coming year, totaling almost one half million US Dollars.

For Forodhani Park, as for all of our Historic City efforts, the watchword is sustainability. Each project must generate enough income not only to balance the books each year but also to reinvest in maintenance and

further development. Our mandate is that no such project should require future support from government or any other institution, but should stand on its own, as an entirely independent engine of community progress.

In summing up, we might well describe each of these initiatives, including Forodhani Park as gifts to the future.

For, even as we look back in time at a moment like this – so we should also look thoughtfully ahead.

Even as we sense today the influence of the distant past, so we should also think of generations yet unborn - people who will live here and people who will visit, and who will see these sites as gateways to their own history.

And of course we must also look to the more immediate future. We are ready now for Phase Two of the Seafront Rehabilitation Project, working with the World Bank and the Government of Zanzibar to rehabilitate an additional 315 metres of the seafront wall, while widening the area to facilitate pedestrian communication and traffic flow along Mizangani Road. Infrastructure improvements will also be critical, including items such as road surfaces, waste disposal, water and power supplies, signage and public lighting.

Finally, if our goal is to see all of the historic buildings along this seafront truly restored, with new purpose, and contributing anew to the quality of life for those who live and visit here, then I would include in that dream a new Indian Ocean Maritime Museum. Such a museum would celebrate appropriately a centuries-long story of international and intercultural accomplishment, with Zanzibar at its very heart. An Indian Ocean Maritime Museum would join the existing House of Wonders and the Palace Museum as part of Stone Town's great cultural hub. And should the Orphanage Building next to this Park ever have a different destiny, could it not be an ideal home for Zanzibar's newest museum? The Aga Khan Trust for Culture would most certainly support such a unique and exciting initiative.

Part of what makes this site so captivating, is that it links the natural environment with the built environment, the Divine Creation, on the one hand with human creativity on the other. Here endless seascapes humble us in the face of the eternal and unknowable - while a splendid cityscape expresses the confident accomplishments of particular historic moments.

It is not surprising that the waterfront area of Stone Town has been designated as a World Heritage Site. And it is heartening to know that so many of you share a deep appreciation and affection for this site - for what it has meant in the past - and for what it can now mean, for the community, and for those who will share in its beauty for many years to come.

Thank you for being part of this memorable occasion.