

Remarks of His Highness the Aga Khan

**Inaugural Pluralism Lecture
by H.E. Roza Otunbayeva
Former President of the Kyrgyz Republic**

Ottawa – May 28, 2012

Her Excellency Roza Otunbayeva
Chief Justice McLachlin
Ministers
Excellencies
Distinguished Guests

Welcome to this launching by the Global Centre for Pluralism of its annual *Pluralism Lecture Series*. This is a significant milestone – and I cannot think of an inaugural speaker better suited than the remarkable leader whom it is my honor to introduce. Her Excellency Roza Otunbayeva is a woman of courage, and conviction, whom I have come to admire and respect greatly, over the many years that the Aga Khan Development Network and I have been engaged in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia.

As a leader, President Otunbayeva understood and championed the democratic aspirations of her peoples, guiding the country, in all its diversity, through the region's first peaceful and constitutional transfer of power - a remarkable achievement with tremendous implications for governance inside and outside Kyrgyzstan. Excellency, I am so very pleased that you have graciously accepted my invitation to launch this lecture series with an address to the distinguished group assembled here today.

In the course of my work over the past half-century, I have become convinced that finding ways for diverse societies to live peacefully together is one of the principal challenges of the contemporary world. It has led me to the conclusion that pluralism as an ethic of respect for diversity is an essential building block of successful and prosperous societies.

Canada is one of the best examples of a country that has embraced its diversity and cultivated a vision of nationhood based on shared and democratic citizenship. It should therefore come as no surprise that the Global Centre for Pluralism is headquartered in Ottawa. The Centre is founded on a strong and vital partnership with the Government of Canada, rooted in our

common belief in respect for diversity and the importance of building inclusive societies. Excellency, as a former Kyrgyz Ambassador to Canada, you are no stranger to this country's commitment to participatory democracy. And you have, through your own example, shown that an enlightened leadership recognizes that, nothing less than this, is acceptable for any society.

It is my hope that the Global Centre for Pluralism will serve the global community as a neutral space for dialogue and comparative exchange about the institutions, policies and practices that foster respect for diversity, cultivate shared citizenship, and ultimately build inclusive societies.

Much of the ongoing conflict we are witnessing in today's world is linked to a rejection of pluralism. One of the most important ways for the Centre to better apprehend this challenge and contribute to enhancing pluralism is to learn from world figures who have directly experienced it, and addressed it successfully. Our inaugural speaker has shown that it can be done.

Roza Otunbaeva guided her country through the initial stages of its democratic journey, but as she herself has repeatedly stressed, Kyrgyzstan's future as a democracy depends on the implementation of the rule of law, including respect for human rights and due process, judicial reform, and national reconciliation. These reforms will take time and will require continued leadership from the peoples and the Government of Kyrgyzstan as well as support from international partners, including Canada and the Global Centre for Pluralism.

Madam Otunbayeva, on behalf of the Board of the Global Centre for Pluralism it gives me great pleasure to welcome you here this evening to launch the *Pluralism Lecture Series*. We are extremely fortunate to have you with us to share your first-hand perspective on the prospects and challenges for democracy and pluralism in your increasingly important part of the world.