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The Aga Khan, spiritual leader of the world's Shia Ismaili Muslims, receives an honorary doctor of laws degree at the U of A convocation Tuesday. He praised Canada's multicultural society in a speech.

Aga Khan inspires Alberta grads

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The spiritual leader of the world's Ismaili Muslims stood before a crowd of University of Alberta graduates Tuesday and implored them to use their education to spread Canada's success as a multicultural society.

The world is suffering through a "deficit" of ethical conduct and respect for pluralism, and educated people are badly needed to guide humanity on the right path, the Aga Khan said to a packed Jubilee Auditorium.

"A pluralistic attitude is not something with which people are born — an instinctive fear of what is different is perhaps a more common human trait," he said.

"But such fear is a condition that

can be transcended and that is why teaching about pluralism is such an important objective, at every educational level."

He made his comments while receiving a honorary doctor of laws degree at the U of A's spring convocation, the fourth such distinction he holds from Canadian universities.

The Aga Khan has served for the past 52 years as the leader of the world's 15 million Shia Ismailis, including some 100,000 in Canada.

"He's visionary leader, but also a spiritual leader and that puts him in a very elite category," university president Indira Samarasekera said. "In many respects, for our Ismaili community, having his Highness here is the equivalent of having the Pope here for Catholics."

She said the university invited him to campus because of his work cre-

ating the Aga Khan Development Network, a broad-based organization directing improvements in some of the poorest parts of the world, particularly parts of Asia and Africa. The network's services range from school programs and health-care to economic development and architecture preservation.

Education is a major part of the network's mandate, the Aga Khan told the Journal in an interview following the ceremony.

The graduates he spoke to Tuesday were mainly aspiring teachers, and he said he hopes they will contribute to improving the standards of education around the world.

He declined to use the word "obligation," but said he sees in today's generation of young adults a spirit of "generosity" to share their knowledge.