



## AGA KHAN FOUNDATION U.S.A.

**PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Standing with Civil Society: USAID and Aga Khan Foundation Convene High Profile Event on Global Civil Society Trends**

**WASHINGTON, D.C., DECEMBER 11, 2014** – Yesterday Aga Khan Foundation U.S.A. (AKF USA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) convened an interactive panel discussion with over 100 representatives of civil society, academia, development partners, and think tanks at the *Global Trends in Civil Society Resilience: Opportunities and Challenges*. The panel highlighted the latest findings from the USAID and Aga Khan Foundation-supported Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI) reports. First developed by USAID in 1997, the CSOSI enables users to track developments and identify trends in the civil society sector over time while allowing for cross-country and cross-region comparison.

In September 2013, President Obama launched *Stand with Civil Society*, a global call to action to support, defend, and sustain civil society amid a rising tide of restrictions on its operations globally, stating: “If you want strong, successful countries, you need strong, vibrant civil societies. When citizens are free to organize and work together across borders to make our communities healthier, our environment cleaner, and our world safer, that’s when real change comes.” This past September, President Obama issued a Presidential Memorandum on *Deepening U.S. Government Efforts to Collaborate with and Strengthen Civil Society*, directing U.S. agencies to defend and strengthen civil society abroad.

The USAID-Aga Khan Foundation event was an opportunity to discuss global trends and share best practices related to civil society resilience to continue moving forward in keeping with the President’s initiatives. Claire Ehmann, Civil Society and Media Division Chief, USAID’s Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance, opened the event with introductory remarks. The discussion featured Paige Alexander, USAID Assistant Administrator for the Bureau for Europe and Eurasia, who moderated a panel with Dr. Mirza Jahani, CEO of Aga Khan Foundation U.S.A.; Amy Hawthorne, Resident Senior Fellow with the Atlantic Council’s Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East; and Alex Sardar, Vice President of Programs, Counterpart International.

Drawing in part on recent editions of the Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI) report, supported by USAID and AKF, participants discussed challenges faced by civil society today, ranging from operating in an environment of conflict and ethnic tensions, to closing political space for civic participation, to changing financial and donor landscapes.

“The United States is standing with civil society as it finds ways to translate citizen demands and preferences into more accountable governance and institutions in a sustainable way.” said USAID Assistant Administrator Paige Alexander. “By doing so, we help build more resilient, democratic societies.”

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On the spectrum involved in civil society Dr. Jahani remarked, “The private sector itself is a stakeholder in civil society. In terms of new thinking, we need to consider what the private sector’s role is in demonstrating for change and improvement in quality of life. If street lights and health care don’t work, the private sector loses out as well.”

Despite the challenges, most panelists agreed that recent global trends reveal that civil society continues to engage with citizens and governments to provide innovative solutions to promote peace and mitigate conflict, push for and protect political space for engagement, and address long-term development challenges.

To learn more and read the full reports, visit:

<http://www.partnershipsinaction.org/content/civil-society-sustainability-index>

### **About Aga Khan Foundation U.S.A.**

AKF USA, established in 1981, is a private, non-denominational, not-for-profit international development organization committed to alleviating poverty, hunger, illiteracy and poor health. AKF USA works to address the root causes of poverty by supporting and sharing innovative solutions in the areas of health, education, rural development, civil society, and the environment. AKF USA is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service code.

AKF USA is part of the Aga Khan Development Network ([www.akdn.org](http://www.akdn.org)), a network of private, non-denominational, development agencies around the world, established by His Highness the Aga Khan to empower communities and individuals, often in disadvantaged circumstances, improve living conditions and opportunities. The Network’s agencies work for the common good of all citizens, regardless of their gender, origin or religion and its underlying impulse is the ethic of compassion for the vulnerable in society.

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