

University of Central Asia Convocation 2025  
Address by Dr Shamsh Kassim-Lakha  
Chair, Board of Trustees

*Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim*

Honourable Governor of Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, Alisher Mirzonabotov  
Honourable Governor of Naryn, Altynbek Ergeshov  
Deputy Governors  
Members of the Board of Trustees  
Rector Christopher Gerry  
Dean Maxim Khomyakov  
Faculty and staff  
Parents, family members, honoured guests,  
And the stars of today, the Graduates of the Class of 2025

*Assalam alaikum* and good morning.

On behalf of the Chancellor, the Board of Trustees and the entire UCA community, I convey our warmest felicitations to the Class of 2025. You've crossed the finish line – well deserved!

Today, we also acknowledge the dedication of the faculty, management, staff, and volunteers in guiding and supporting the education of these exceptional young women and men.

Our special admiration, however, must go to the parents and families of the graduating class. It was a profound commitment on your part to trust the vision and promise of this young institution.

Let me begin with a story—not mine, but yours.

Most of you arrived here from distant valleys and remote towns. Others came from across Central Asia's cities and yet others from far off countries. You brought with you different languages, customs, faiths, and worldviews. In Naryn and Khorog, you laughed together and debated passionately.

But the challenges were many.

You navigated a global pandemic, adapted to remote learning and returned to classrooms transformed by new realities. Through it all—you discovered each other's humanity, shaped your values, strengthened your resolve, and deepened your capacity for empathy. In five years, your alma mater has forged you into a fraternity, which I hope will last your lifetime.

This happy day also marks the beginning of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrating the signing of the Treaty establishing the University of Central Asia by the Presidents of the Republic of Tajikistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Ismaili Imam.

This University was not built in the comfort of capital cities. It rose—stone by stone—in mountain towns where others saw only remoteness and challenges.

I remember when trucks carrying construction materials and equipment were delayed for weeks as they traversed multiple country borders from Europe through Turkey, the Caucasus, and finally across Central Asia. Other vehicles came from Pakistan through China. Bureaucratic hurdles, cross-border tensions, and harsh terrains raised concerns about completion of the campuses on time and commencement of classes on schedule. Recruitment of faculty and development of an innovative curriculum and approval by multiple authorities brought their own issues. This is a moment therefore to also acknowledge the guidance of the Board of Trustees and the perseverance of the various teams including the craftsmen of Naryn and Khorog who made this happen.

None of this would have been possible without the extraordinary vision and sustained leadership of our Founding Chancellor, His Highness the Aga Khan IV, and the support of the Presidents and governments of the Republic of Tajikistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and the Republic of Kazakhstan—our Founding States—who joined hands to establish this unique regional institution.

Dear graduates, as you enter the wide world, let me leave you with a final thought.

Your education at UCA has prepared you not only to earn a livelihood, but to live a life of meaning. A life where success will not be measured by personal gain, but by the positive change you bring through service to others.

It is said that “service is the rent you pay for the space you occupy on earth”. In partial discharge of the rent, you owe for occupying this earth, I ask that during your lifetime you support the higher education of at least one other person in need.

So Graduands, as you leave these highland campuses—framed by snow-capped peaks, never underestimate the quiet power of kindness and the blessings of serving others.

Congratulations, Class of 2025.

Thank you.

***Having conveyed my remarks, I have another very pleasant duty. We have received a message from our Chancellor His Highness the Aga Khan V which he has asked me to read to you on his behalf.***

***Chancellor’s Message:***

Honourable Ministers;  
Honourable Governors;  
Chair and Members of the Board of Trustees;  
Rector, Faculty and staff of the University;  
Parents, partners, and friends;  
And most importantly, dear graduates of the Class of 2025:

I am truly delighted to be addressing you and your families on this special day, and to share a few words as we mark this important milestone together. I understand that celebrations are

taking place at both our Khorog and Naryn campuses, and I am sorry not to be with you in person.

Let me begin by warmly congratulating the graduates on this day, which marks the culmination of five years of hard work by you and your faculty, and the sacrifices of your families. You will leave today with your degree certificate in hand – a testament to your achievement – and carry with you the knowledge gained during your time at UCA for the rest of your lives.

Today's ceremony is not only a celebration of your achievements, but also an opportunity for us to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the International Treaty that established UCA as a regional university through the extraordinary partnership between the Founding States of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, and the Ismaili Imamat. Together with our partners and many stakeholders, we have achieved a great deal over these 25 years – and I am excited about the successes the next quarter of a century will bring.

This is my first address to you as Chancellor of the University, and I wish to begin by acknowledging my late father's vision in conceptualising, founding, and implementing this extraordinary and pioneering project. If he were here with us today, he would be proud and delighted to witness the achievement of the graduating class.

In the work of UCA, and across the broader endeavours of the Aga Khan Development Network, the Ismaili Imamat remains committed to improving the lives of the people of Central Asia – working in close partnership with governments and other valued collaborators through our shared efforts and projects. Access to high-quality education is a fundamental pillar of our approach to development and has the potential to bring about transformational and lasting impact.

We are living through a period of profound transformation and change, and the pace of technological advancement is accelerating. The field of education is undergoing the biggest change since the printing press, and UCA will have a duty to be at the forefront of this change. We are also witnessing the dramatic effects of climate change on our lives, which is particularly relevant in the mountain regions in which UCA operates. Global economic trends are also evolving, with significant shifts in trade patterns amidst a volatile geopolitical backdrop, and re-emerging models of governance.

In this context, I trust that the graduating class is well placed to navigate the challenges ahead. The majors you have studied are of particular relevance – whether it is Economics, Computer Science, Communications and Media, or Earth and Environmental Sciences. More importantly, our programme will have given you broad exposure to many disciplines and developed your ability to learn and to apply critical thinking. You are also fluent in your national languages and in English, the universal language of business and the internet.

The litmus test of the value of a university is how its graduates fare in the future – what they make of their education. I have every confidence that this graduating class will go on to be great contributors to society, and my best wishes and prayers are with you for your success and happiness.

Let me conclude by expressing my deepest gratitude to all who have made this journey possible over the past 25 years: the Founding States, the faculty and staff, the Board of Trustees, our donors and volunteers – and importantly, the communities who have welcomed this University

into their midst. The road ahead will bring new challenges, but also new promise. Let us walk it together – with purpose, in partnership, and with enduring hope.

Thank you.