

**SPEECH GIVEN BY
FRANK ISLAM
AT
Aligarh Muslim University
Feb 2012**

Distinguished guests and ladies and gentlemen:

I would like to sincerely thank all of you for coming and thank you for your hospitality. I appreciate your warm welcome. It is great to be here today with fellow Aligarians. I am thrilled and honored to be with you today. I am proud to be an Alumnus of Aligarh Muslim University. I am proud to be standing here, and looking at you today, I have never felt so blessed.

Before starting my speech, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Tauqueer Sherwani for inviting me to speak to you today. I want to thank Tauqueer for his leadership and our firm friendship. All of you have been instrumental in creating conditions and culture for Aligarians to excel.

I congratulate you in honoring the legacy of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and remembering our commitment to the principles upon which Aligarh Muslim University was founded – service to humanity

I commend all of you for serving the educational and social and cultural needs of the community. I want to express my deep gratitude for your generosity and your efforts and your commitments.

I am here to speak “Our roles and responsibilities in shaping the next generations of Aligarians “. Remember it is our responsibility to secure the future we all share. Let me briefly outline what I want to talk to you today:

_ I will start with few words about AMU and a few words about education and its importance. I will describe my personal story and journey

- Then I will share some ideas regarding our role and responsibilities to create next generations of successful Aligarians.
- Then I will conclude my remarks

Let me say a few words about AMU. This university helped shape the lives of many generations. This university has inspired and influenced many generations. This university has provided hopes, dreams, and future for many generations. I have always held AMU in high esteem. Aligarh is beacon of hope. Its leaders shaped our history and its leaders have shaped our destiny. Its principles have guided us. It has stood the test of time. Aligarh is a true treasure. AMU has been and continues to be one of the foremost academic institutions in the world. All of you should be thankful for the opportunity to attend AMU and graduate. All of us owe a sense of gratitude to AMU. All of us are deeply indebted to AMU.

A lot of things bring us together because all of us are bound by a shared love of AMU and all of us are linked by common goals and common interests and common cause. We are divided by distance but we are united by our history and heritage. We are part of Aligarh family. Aligarh tells the story of our past and it defines our future. Aligarh remains an inseparable and an indispensable part of our life and our journey and our story. I still cherish the fond memories of Aligarh. I never lost my love of Aligarh. Aligarh stands as a shining symbol of quality, equality, dignity, decency, inclusiveness, openness, tolerance, and respect. These are the qualities and the values of Aligarh that all of us can proudly and truly embrace.

I want to share my personal journey from humble beginnings to success.

I crossed the ocean to go to America. My own remarkable success story from Azamgarh to Aligarh to America should resonate well with millions of peoples across the globe. It reaffirms the notion that if you aim high and if you work hard you should be able to pursue your dream. I inspired my employees by setting examples. I learned from my failures. I had clear vision and goals. I believe through hard work and sacrifice each of you can pursue your own individual dreams. For you no dream should be too far out of reach. Success has taught me how to move forward, but failure has taught me to never go backwards. I want to tell my story to others because it is my sincere hope that you find inspiration in my story so that you can achieve greater success in your life.

Why Education Matters

Before I say few words about Education, let me give you findings of Indian Muslims in Education. It is reported that among Indian Muslims, the literacy rate is about 59 percent; less than four percent of Indian Muslims graduate from school; and less than two percents of the students in the elite Indian Institute of Technology are Muslims. About 55 percent of Muslims in villages have never been to school. These numbers tell us the seriousness of the situation. It reminds us how entrenched poverty in the Indian Muslim Community has become. The situation for many Muslims especially youths are heartbreaking. It is the poverty that breeds violence and it is the poverty that fuels frustration and it is the poverty that fuels desperation. Let us commit to working together to eradicate poverty. Poverty does not belong in a civilized society but it belongs in the museum. Let us become the voices for those who are voiceless and let us extend our hand of help those who are helpless. All of us should do well to remember that no culture and no country and no civilization have monopoly on wisdom.

I am sure there is a deep reservoir of anger in Indian Muslims because they have to confront hostility and deep-seated discrimination and open prejudices in addition to lack of education. They share a common dwellings but not in a common effort. They share a city but not a community. The sparks of frustration, desperation, and discontent are still burning among the Muslims. They see dark and hopeless world. They are also facing a new challenge due to the rise of extremism and terrorism. These challenges are surmounting and overbearing. I am appalled and deeply disappointed of the living conditions of Muslims in India. Despite India's expanding

economy and the fruits of rising wealth, the opportunity for economic and social mobility have largely by passed Muslims and low casts.

Unfortunately Extremism forces take away strengths of our faith and they have become an impediment to stability, security, development, peace, and prosperity. We should not allow religion to become the trigger for terrorism and extremism. Please join me in this journey so that we can close the door of despair and darkness and disappointment and open the door of prosperity and upward mobility. Please join me in this journey so that we can together break the barrier and boundary of biases and bigotry. We have to eradicate the barrier which divides us. We need to end the discrimination based on religion. There is no place for religion injustice. People need to respect human dignity. People should be treated according to their talents not their background and belief.

Education is a powerful equalizer opening doors to all to lift themselves out of poverty. We should develop a culture that reinforces the values and importance of education. Lack of access to education creates a vicious cycle that crushes a person's hope for improvement. The greatest gift we can give is the gift of education .Education is the key ingredient of success. Education empowers people and enhances the dignity and self- respect of a human being. It plays a pivotal role in creating jobs and building prosperity, and it is a powerful engine of innovation and entrepreneurship. Education is the best investment we can make to build our future. We need to make education more affordable and accessible. We must close the gap between wealthy and the low income. We need education system that emphasizes in developing leadership skills. We need to support educational opportunities for every one because no matter who you are or what you are interested in, a good education becomes a solid foundation on which to build your life's goals.

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN CREATING NEXT GENERATIONS OF ALIGARIANS

It is our responsibility to work towards the development of Aligarians. We have to build a bold vision and clear commitment to create today's student for tomorrow's job. It is your responsibility to serve the public and community. Your role is to increase awareness for new generations. Your character and talent will contribute the direction and success of this university.

I would like to share with you some thoughts and some ideas for the path forward. Following can provide a framework in building successful career trajectory for the next generations:

- a. We should continue to fund scholarship programs to students at AMU. I know a lot of people in U.S including myself have funded scholarships for students. Remember our students have always been our best hope. By investing in these scholarship is ways of keeping hope alive.
- b. We need to develop and fund scholarship programs at the primary and secondary level.

- c. We need to develop training and skills centers for students. This will create a new generation of students with skills to excel. It will also prepare them with various competitive exams. I would like to see training center for teachers as well.
- d. We need to develop youth mentoring programs
- e. We need to put emphasis on education of girls and we should encourage women to be part of job market.
- f. We need to forge relationship and collaboration between AMU and various U.S. Universities.
- g. We need to become more politically involved to make sure our voices are heard.

In 2010 with my help and support a MOU between AMU and GWU Law School was signed. My Foundation funded scholarship program for some students in 2010 and 2011. We were successful in getting some students from AMU to GWU. I see an exciting future built on the strengths and success of two universities. I would like to expand this relationship in other areas such as Business and Art and Science. It is my deep desire to expand this initiative to several other U.S. Universities. I believe I can help

In closing

Let us strengthen and deepen our ties and engagement with AMU so that we can create future for next generations of Aligarians. Every Aligarian has a right to pursue their dreams, but the dream must belong to all Aligarians who are willing to get educated, work hard and pursue their life goals. I must stress that key word here is “opportunity” not guarantee. As long as we protect opportunities, we will prevail.

All of us will do well to remember all things are possible when we work together, when we learn from one another, when we listen to each other and when we set aside our differences to work for shared goals. Remember everything is possible if we have the desire, drive and discipline. Remember any thing and everything is possible, when we sacrifice together and when we struggle together. What is so unique and distinctive and important about Aligarh are the Aligarian people. They believe in their ability and the ability of their children to get ahead. They are strong, vibrant, responsible and resilient, and we are a community of dreamers and doers. Therefore I am confident that if all of us work together to provide hope and opportunities, I can say Aligarh’s best days will be ahead of us and not behind us.

All of us have a role and responsibility to shape Aligarh’s fate and future. Future is not an accident but future is built on planning. Remember the future is promised to those who create it – not to those who live in the past. I believe it is imperative for all of us to take a more proactive and prominent role in the quest for Aligarh’s future. We have to recognize that this is a continuous journey. That journey began, and is sustained by the contributions of you as an individual. Remember as long as we believe in ourselves the future will always be ours. As we approach the dawn of this new decade and the dawn of the 21st century, let us weave into the fabric of our society a sense of hope, a sense of positive energy and a sense that we all are in this together. If we come together we will endure and thrive. Let us never forget the values that our community shares; the belief that with education and hard work and with sacrifice we can give our children a better life. Let us dedicate ourselves to draw

upon the values, ingenuity, decency, dignity, and spirit that have always defined the greatness of this university. Your future is promising as your proud past.

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak to you today. Thanks you for your time and your friendship. I wish all of you continued success in the future.

I would like to end my speech with Sir Syed's remarks:

“ You have reached a particular stage and remember one thing that when I undertook this task, there were criticism all around against me, life has become so difficult for me that I aged before my age, I lost my hair, my eyesight, but not my vision. My vision never dimmed, and my determination never failed, I built this institution for you and I am sure, you will carry the light of this institution far and wide, darkness will disappear from all around.”

Let us fulfill Sir Syed's vision and his mission. Let us carry the torch handed to us by Sir Syed Khan. Let us work together to ensure that his dream shall never die and his cause will endure.

If you need a copy of my speech please visit my website www.frankislam.com

Thank you and God bless you.