



## *Her Highness the Begum Aga Khan*

### *BIOGRAPHY*

Begum Inaara Aga Khan comes from a family of successful German entrepreneurs. She was born on 1st of April, 1963 in Frankfurt/Main, Germany, the daughter of Renate Thyssen-Henne and Helmut Friedhelm Homey. She later adopted the name "Thyssen" from her step-father Dr. Bodo Thyssen (descendent of Thyssen steel dynasty).



After attending the Schloss Salem School on Lake Constance and the Ecole des Roches in Normandy, the Begum read jurisprudence at the Universities of Munich and Cologne. She graduated magna cum laude with a doctorate in International Law in 1990 after completing her thesis on German-American commercial law, the title of which was: "How to Protect the Trade Secret in the USA under special consideration of the penal code of New York".

The Begum's early career included working, whilst still at university, in the management of her mother's company (at the time Austria's largest hotel and restaurant chain) and later for one of the most prominent German commercial law firms of that time. Dr. Gabriele Thyssen married Prince Karl-Emich zu Leiningen in 1991 in Venice, Italy. After interrupting her career prior to the birth of her daughter, Princess Theresa in April 1992, Princess Gabriele zu Leiningen became a consultant for UNESCO in Paris, advising on the promotion of equality and improved conditions for women.

In May of 1998, Princess Gabriele zu Leiningen married Prince Karim Aga Khan IV (The Aga Khan), the 49th hereditary Imam (spiritual leader) of the Shia Ismaili Muslims and became the Begum Aga Khan. Prior to her marriage to the Aga Khan and her conversion to Islam, the couple jointly chose the Muslim name "Inaara" (derived from the Arabic nur, meaning "light") for the bride. Their son, Prince Aly Muhammad Aga Khan, was born in March 2000.

The Begum's first priority has always been her children and the care of her family. The Begum also embraces charitable causes, particularly those concerning the rights of women and children, and seeks to better the living conditions of all people in underdeveloped countries. She also promotes understanding and tolerance amongst varied ethnic and religious communities.

Since 1999, the Begum has been supporting micro-loans and third world development projects through the German foundation "Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe" (UP foundation). The foundation funds micro-loans to families and single parents to promote self reliance and to end the vicious circle of poverty in developing countries, which include Cambodia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Montenegro, India, Pakistan, Romania, Thailand and Vietnam



In January of 2002, the Begum became the Honorary President of Focus Humanitarian Assistance (FOCUS), the crisis response agency that is an affiliate of the Aga Khan Foundation Network (AKDN) and which provides relief and support services during and following natural and man-made disasters, primarily in Asia and Africa. In this capacity, the Begum supported a number of projects for repatriation of the Afghan refugees to their homeland and rebuilding civil society in Afghanistan.

In addition the Begum continued to contribute to numerous UNESCO Projects, particularly in the area of welfare for women and children, for example UNESCO's "Passport for Equality" project. Causes involving women's and children's issues have always been close to the Begum's heart. Consequently, the Begum has supported many worthy causes for the protection of women and children. Amongst others, she accepted the patronage of the international aid organization "Innocence in Danger" in order to help victims of pedophilia.

Together with her mother Renate Thyssen-Henne and her step-father Ernst-Theodor Henne, the Princess founded in 2003, the German aid organization "SOS Projects for People and Animals" to help mentally-ill, handicapped and traumatized children with the support of animals, particularly dogs, to bring fun and joy into the children lives, and to overcome their pain and suffering.

Since 2004, the Begum has become intensively involved in the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic and has supported the German AIDS Foundation by promoting awareness and through fund raising. The German AID Foundation supports a variety of projects for HIV infected and AIDS victims in Germany, mainly in Berlin, but also in African countries.

In order to respond in a more effective way to the above mentioned humanitarian programmes the Begum founded an umbrella organization, The Princess Inaara Foundation in 2004. The purpose of the foundation is to provide philanthropic assistance to the causes and charitable organizations whose work represents the humanitarian goals that the Begum has long supported.

The Begum's motto is "Charity begins in the family". Being raised in a warm and caring environment, the Begum and her brother, Joachim Thyssen, learnt from their mother the values of commitment, courage, fair play and to help and protect those who are less fortunate and weak. The Princess and her mother are very close and the Princess regards her as best friend and role model.

One of the Begum's hobbies are music and singing. During her first years of studies at the LMU University in Munich, she not only recorded several songs but she once, at the age of 21, took pleasure in participating in the contest for the Euro-Vision. She enjoys singing every now and then for her children, friends and on special occasions.