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EDITORIAL

To specialists in archaeology and those interested in National cultural heritage, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 is a source of pride and jubilation. Introduced by HRH Deputy Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman and ratified by the Council of Ministers, Vision 2030 presents ambitious and promising programs covering various vital fields: economic, social, and developmental. Most important, it pays careful attention to the Saudi, Arab and Islamic National Historic and Cultural Heritage. In this regard, the Vision places utmost importance on preserving and maintaining this heritage, launching an Islamic Museum that embodies, throughout the ages, the Kingdom's upkeep of true righteous Islam and documents the lives of Muslims and the deep-rooted attachment they have for the Two Holy Mosques.

Vision 2030 has also emphasized the importance of preserving the National Identity, its promotion and publicity, along with the importance of handing it down to future generations. Such a task calls, among other things, for the careful attention paid to the youth's social upbringing and the Arabic Language. As for heritage, it calls for the launching and sustained maintenance of museums, persistent revival of national, Arab, and Islamic heritage sites and having those officially registered in World Heritage Sites. For a rewarding outcome, an easy public access to such sites must be implemented since those are eloquent testimonials to the deep-rooted national legacies and the active roles the area played on the map of human civilizations.

The Arabian Peninsula, since pre-historic ages, has hosted many authentic civilizations and inherited rich cultural legacies. It is only natural, therefore, that Vision 2030 demands that more national places be registered with UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Achieving this task has its immense moral and material rewards. To cite but few, the World Heritage Convention encourages local communities to take part in the planning and management of such sites. Registrations of heritage sites raise public awareness of the importance of these places and highlight their worldwide exceptional values. All this leads to tourism increase and contributes positively to the environment development. Local traditional professions and handcrafts in the site areas eventually flourish, providing work opportunities for the local community, enhancing the area's economic income, in addition to promoting one's sense of belonging and gratification.

All States pursue all venues to have their heritage sites included in the World

Heritage List; such inclusion facilitates their protection, development, necessary support of preservation, and ultimately secure survival for future generations.

At its 17th session held in Paris, 16 November 1972, the UNESCO General Conference adopted the “Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.” About 179 countries joined the agreement which promotes and protects the significant natural and cultural features that enjoy international and exceptional values for humanity and future generations.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, rich in its natural and cultural heritage, has been active in this regard over the past decade. Its representative body, the Saudi Commission for Tourism & National Heritage (SCTH), has successfully registered four sites at the World Heritage List. These are:

al-Hijr Archaeological Site (Madâin Sâlih) included in 1429H (2008)

at-Turaif District in ad-Dir’iyah, included in 1431H (2010)

Historic Jeddah, the Gate to Makkah, included in 1435H (2014)

Rock Art in the Hail Region of Saudi Arabia, included in 1436H (2015)

SCTH has exerted all necessary efforts to have its sites included in the World Heritage Sites. The procedures for having the first site (al-Hijr: Madâin Sâlih) registered took years before coming to a successful end. The process started in 1422H (2001) with a careful study of the provisions to be met by World Heritage Sites.

Five years later, HRH Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, President of SCTH, met with UNESCO Director-General Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura during the latter’s visit to the National Museum in Riyadh. At that meeting Mr. Matsuura emphasized the necessity that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia ought to have its heritage sites included in the World Heritage List; the Kingdom, he suggested, enjoys many places of high cultural and civilization value. A Royal Order, dated 19/ 7/ 1427H (August 14, 2006), gave the permission to have three sites registered with the international organization. Those were: al-Hijr (Madâin Sâlih), ancient ad-Dir’iyah, and Historic Jeddah. With this generous Royal support, SCTH presented to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre the preliminary list of the three sites. Those were tentatively accepted on 17 September 2006 (24 Ramadan 1427H).

Consequently, on the 31st of January, 2007 (11/1/1428H) the file of al-Hijr (Madâin Sâlih) as the first nominated site of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for inclusion in the World Heritage List was formally submitted, along with a detailed report covering works SCTH carried out at the site, its protection plan, and management. And Soon thereafter, the World Heritage Committee announced its decision for the inclusion of al-Hijr (Madâin Sâlih) in the World Heritage List on the 7th of June 2008 (4/7/1429H).

After the inclusion of the four sites, SCTH has profiled ten other sites on the preliminary list as a first step for inclusion in the World Heritage Sites. These sites are: Durb Zubaidah, Hijaz Railway, Sham Pilgrimage Route, Egypt Pilgrimage Route, Qaryat Rijal Alma', Qaryat thi Ein, al-Ahsa Oasis, Hima Well, Qaryat al-Faw, and finally ad-Dira' Neighborhood of Dumat al-Jandal, in al-Jawf Region.

Furthermore, SCTH took the initiative to register other Saudi cultural forms in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage. These are: as-Saggarat (2012), al-Majaliss (2015), Arabian Coffee (2015), and the Najdi Folkloric Dance— 'Ardah (2015).

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