

"Culture: The key to sustainable development", a speech by HRH Prince Sultan bin Salman, President of SCTA, at the UNESCO International Conference, organized by the Government of China 15-17 May 2013, in Hongzo city.

Bismillahirrahmanirahim

(In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful)

Thank you very much.

Your Highnesses, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Saudi Arabia, like many other countries, has gone through several stages of intensive development in the field of archaeology, and more so because of the oil wealth in our country. After the discovery of oil, we decided that this valuable natural resource should play an important role in our efforts to improve the lives of our citizens.

For example, economically we have invested heavily in schools, universities and educational programs, and we are implementing several programs to finance local initiatives. We have more than ten ancient villages that have been restored, and many cultural hotels have been built. A Heritage Hotels Company has just been established, and our national agro-tourism program has just been launched as an economic initiative.

Today, Saudi Arabia has a clear direction for developing its archeological and heritage resources, and has achieved goals that far surpass those of many other countries.

I have been interested and involved for the past 25 to 30 years, the most important years of my youth, in the subject of heritage. Many of the things that we are working on at this time reflect what Their Highnesses spoke about today. The role of culture and partnerships developed by the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, not only with the government organizations, but also with many local communities as well as private sector, is immense.

I believe today, under the great foresighted King Abdullah who rules us in the present, we are urging the world's communities to see, pay attention and be involved in their own heritage development and its preservation.

Saudi Arabia today is truly going through a most comprehensive program of not only preserving but also rediscovering its own history, its own culture, and its own heritage. We are very much engaged on a massive level with regional governors and governments in the development of our heritage resources. In fact, as I speak to you today, a team of local municipal leaders have just returned from a trip to Spain, one of the many trips we have implemented in exploring and gaining international expertise in the areas of heritage.

The same people who were destroying our national heritage in the past are now full partners in the development and protection of our heritage. They have discovered the beauty of our heritage

and are working on how it can be developed for the benefit of the people, as heritage is important and it plays a central role in our present as well as in our future.

As an example, Saudi Arabia is currently building a number of universities and institutions. The development of multiple projects in the Kingdom is occurring simultaneously at a rate that is unsurpassed anywhere in the Middle East.

Today, I believe as a champion of friendship for so many years, Saudi Arabia is opening up new avenues in many different directions.

The exhibition that you mentioned, the "Roads of Arabia", which opened in 2010, has already been shown in several European countries and it will be opening in the United States of America, God willing on the 21st of June this year.

It has been an honor to see Saudi Arabia's role in the protection of Arab heritage, in addition to its role in the unity of Islam. Of course, Saudi Arabia is a land of Islam, the land of the largest world economy and the biggest oil producer in the world, but it is also the land of great civilizations.

We believe that Islam did not land in a barren place, and it did not come to an empty desert, instead, it came to a land of a great pre-Islamic civilization, a land teeming with culture and power, where its population was active in the work of intensive economy and trade. From this climate grew Islam and it spread to become the great religion that it is today. This is one of the reasons for us to proceed in the discovery of our culture and the archaeological treasures in our land.

Today we have more than twenty-five international teams working along with our local Saudi teams in re-discovering the antiquities of Saudi Arabia. The discoveries we are making these days are tremendous, and we believe this is the real part of the world.

There is a lot to discuss in this regard, and this is only the summary. We believe that paying attention to our heritage and culture is essential for our existence; crucial for its importance to our economy, and vital to our future.