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Address by  
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Director-General  
of the United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural Organization  
(UNESCO)

On the occasion of the inauguration of the exhibition “Oman :  
Heritage and Civilization”

UNESCO, 3 October 2005

Mr Minister of Education of the Sultanate of Oman,  
Mr Minister of National Economy of the Sultanate of Oman,  
Mr President of the General Conference,  
Mr Chairman of the Executive Board,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and pleasure for me to welcome you here for the inauguration of this exhibition - “Oman: Heritage and Civilization”. This exhibition will serve as an outstanding opportunity for a large number of people to discover the Sultanate of Oman and acquaint themselves with aspects of the rich culture and traditions of a people with a long, distinctive and fascinating history, as Ambassador Musa Bin Jaafar just demonstrated in his address.

Allow me to begin by thanking Mr Yahya Bin Saud Al Sulaimi, Minister of Education of the Sultanate of Oman, and Mr Ahmad Bin Abd El Nabi Macki, Minister of National Economy, for being with us this evening. I would like to extend my cordial thanks to the Government of Oman for organising this event. I also extend to Ambassador Musa and to his colleagues at the Delegation, my sincere appreciation for facilitating the organisation of this exhibition. I would like to take this opportunity to warmly congratulate the Ambassador once again on becoming, earlier today, the newly-elected President of the 33<sup>rd</sup> session of the General Conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This exhibition is a reflection of the good partnership that exists between UNESCO and the Sultanate of Oman for it covers the two areas where our partnership is at its strongest. In the area of education, we are assisting the Omani Government to reform and improve its educational system so that it is better equipped to handle the challenges of a globalizing world. Particular attention has been paid to secondary education, which is the key to developing the human resources needed by a diversifying economy and a modernising society. UNESCO takes a strong interest in Oman’s educational reform and its progress.

Our partnership is equally strong in the area of culture. Oman’s commitment to the preservation of both the tangible and intangible aspects of traditional heritage and culture is well known. It has five sites inscribed on UNESCO’s World Heritage List, some of which are depicted in the paintings displayed on these walls. In addition, the Omani Craft Heritage Documentation Project seeks, among other things, to document and preserve the traditional skills and modes of living that have been passed from one generation to the next over the centuries – traditions that are embedded in the very identity of the Omani people. Finally, Oman’s signature of the 2003 Convention for

the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, for which I am most grateful, reflects and reinforces the country's commitment to preserve the traditional aspects of its culture in the midst of a rapid modernisation process.

One example of the rich craft tradition of Oman is the Khandjar - the official emblem of the Sultanate of Oman. Similar examples of this sword can be found along the larger part of the Silk Route and even beyond. Yet that of Oman is unmistakable in its form and in the fine craftsmanship of its handle and casing. Each region of the country has its own style, which is linked to the network of traditions and customs that constitute the uniqueness of Omani society. This is clearly a tradition that should continue to be cherished.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me close by extending my thanks once more to the Omani Government and its representatives with us this evening. I hope you all enjoy this marvellous exhibition.

Thank you.