



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
вопросам образования,  
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,  
on the occasion of the inauguration of the exhibition  
on the Archaeological Site of Mada'in Saleh  
(Saudi Arabia)**

**UNESCO, 6 september 2007**

Your Royal Highness,  
Honourable Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you today for the inauguration of this photography exhibition devoted to the archaeological site of Mada'in Saleh.

We are deeply honoured that His Royal Highness Prince Sultan Bin Salman could attend this ceremony. To His Royal Highness and to all distinguished guests, allow me to extend a very warm welcome.

I would also like to thank the Permanent Delegation and the Supreme Commission for Tourism of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for organizing this attractive exhibition, devoted to one of the country's most spectacular cultural sites.

Most of us are familiar with the World Heritage site of Nabataean Petra. However, fewer people know that Petra has a sister further south, stretching over a vast expanse of desert in Saudi Arabia's Al-Medina Al-Munawarah Province. This city, strategically located on the trade route between southern Arabia and Petra, is known today as Mada'in Saleh, or Al-Hijr, meaning the "Rock City".

The most visible archaeological remains - the tombs - bear witness to the talents of the great Nabataean builders and sculptors. However, their beauty should not

obscure the fact that Mada'in Saleh was a thriving trading centre on the legendary Frankincense Trail. This impressive exhibition bears witness to this glorious past, and also to the more recent history of the site.

Your Royal Highness,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In April last year, I had the pleasure to meet with His Royal Highness Prince Sultan bin Salman in Riyadh to discuss, among other matters, the preservation and promotion of Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage. His enthusiasm and firm personal commitment provided the impetus to the submission, in September 2006, of the country's first Tentative List of cultural heritage sites to be proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List.

Three months later, a mission from the World Heritage Centre visited Mada'in Saleh to assist with the nomination process, which was completed last January. I am happy to report that the World Heritage Committee will examine the candidature of Mada'in Saleh at its next session, to be held in Quebec in July 2008.

Saudi authorities are presently working with local stakeholders and the World Heritage Centre to prepare the nominations of the two other sites on the Tentative List, namely the Historical Area of Jeddah and the Turaif Quarter in Al-Diriyah, near the capital city of Riyadh.

I am very pleased that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has recently declared its intention to become a State Party to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. We consider this decision particularly significant, since this legal instrument is one of the three pillars – along with the World Heritage Convention and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions – sustaining the preservation of creative diversity around the world.

UNESCO strongly encourages Saudi Arabia's efforts to promote its heritage, and its protection, both nationally and internationally. In affirming the Saudi Arabian cultural identity, the Kingdom will contribute to UNESCO's priority mission of safeguarding

cultural diversity, thereby enhancing the social cohesion and mutual understanding needed to achieve lasting world peace in an increasingly globalized world.

I hope you enjoy the exhibition and thank you for your attention.