



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 Cultural Heritage of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

UNESCO, 31 March 2008

Director-General of the King Abdulaziz Public Library,
Dear Permanent Delegate of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to UNESCO,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you today for the inauguration of this exhibition of beautiful photographs devoted to the cultural heritage of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

In April last year, I was privileged to meet His Royal Highness Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saoud in Riyadh to discuss, among other matters, the preservation and promotion of Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage. And in September last, His Royal Highness Prince Sultan graced us with his presence here in Paris at the opening of another exhibition organized by your Delegation, about the Archaeological site of Mada'in Saleh. These meetings and exhibitions are testimonies to the importance that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia attaches to its rich cultural heritage, a fact that I came to appreciate at first hand when I visited the country in January 2000 on my first official visit as Director-General of UNESCO to a Member State.

More recently, in December 2007, the Kingdom's pride in Arab Culture was made manifest through its generous contribution to improve the presence of the Arabic language in UNESCO. I thank your country for its continuous support for our actions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Among the photographs in this exhibition are several that feature Saudi Arabia's rich legacy of rock art. Jubbah is the centrepiece of some 2000 known rock-art sites across Saudi Arabia. It presents hundreds of images and elaborate symbols, notably domesticated dogs and camels, left there by ancient peoples at that critical moment of their transition from hunter-gatherer to agricultural communities.

Although most of us are familiar with the World Heritage site of Petra in southwest Jordan, its sister site, Mada'in Saleh in Saudi Arabia is perhaps less well known. Once a flourishing city strategically located on the trade route between southern Arabia and the Mediterranean coast, its remains bear witness to the talents of the great Nabataean builders and sculptors, as you can see on these pictures.

The World Heritage Committee will examine the candidature of Mada'in Saleh to the World Heritage List at its 32nd session in Quebec, next July. If the Committee decides to inscribe this site, it will become Saudi Arabia's first World Heritage site.

Of course, Saudi Arabia's attention to its cultural heritage is not limited to tangible heritage, and I am very pleased that on 10 January 2008 the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, became a State Party to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. We consider this acceptance as particularly significant, since this legal instrument is part of the standard-setting foundation on which UNESCO's action to promote cultural diversity and creativity rests.

To date, more than 90 countries have ratified the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and have resolved to formulate and implement policies and legislation to ensure the viability of this heritage. Among these undertakings, the establishment of inventories and the launch of awareness-raising campaigns hold pride of place. I am confident that Saudi Arabia will play an active role in implementing that Convention both at the national and international level.

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

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