

Young People bring Two Kingdoms together

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Bridging of the cultural divide between two distinctive nations - thus traditional values encounter secular values in this historic encounter.



In the present century, nobody has attributed more to the explanation of Islam in Britain than Saudi Arabia. However, there has been a lot of confusion and misconception in the British media about the people of Saudi Arabia. Most of this comes from the difficulty in obtaining an accurate picture of the Kingdom's diversity and norms from the outside. There is now, more than ever, a need for a cultural dialogue between the people of these nations to achieve understanding and dispel myths.

The Two Kingdoms Youth Summit held in Jeddah and Riyadh January 10-16, 2009 saw the meeting of 48 youth participants from both the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This was a sequel to the first youth summit in 2007 which focused on the contribution of European educational exchange activities to Intercultural Dialogue.

The succeeding congress focussed on the impact of two kingdom exchange activities to

intercultural dialogue between the two countries and its positive implications to building cooperation, cohesiveness and promoting understanding among people of different cultures, specially the youth.

The opening ceremony took place at the Chamber of Commerce in Jeddah on 10th January 2009. Being the gateway to the two holy cities and the gateway to Saudi Arabia, picturesque and awe-inspiring Jeddah was the perfect





place for such an intercultural activity. Jeddah lent a genteel but convivial and enthusiastic atmosphere to all the delegates and guests.

Attended by local dignitaries and prolific figures of Saudi society, it has received prominent media coverage and an enthusiastic response from the two countries. The organisers successfully steered the proceedings to create evocative dialogue between the participants, dispel negative myths about the two kingdoms, and create an atmosphere of cultural learning. The youth summit also aimed to address several issues that

concern the acknowledgment of cultural diversity in Saudi Arabia as well as the opportunities for cultural expression. This has been eloquently discussed by the media. Cultural differences among the participants were seen as challenges to the success of the summit. Through an informal discussion, key issues and challenges surrounding intercultural dialogue were discussed. The forum managed to respond to these many challenges, which include language barriers and finding a common ground for collaboration, among others.

The conference enhanced personal development of the participants by developing appreciation of cultural diversity, making new friends, having fun working and learning together. The participants also produced strategies to address the impediments to building better understanding, trust and cooperation between the two countries.

TWO KINGDOMS CULTURAL AND HERITAGE TOURISM

Cultural Learning and Appreciation



The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a land of astounding beauty, from conventional Bedouin areas to cities replete with avant-garde skyscrapers and superhighways. Interspersed in the forum proceedings, the participants were treated to an unforgettable tour of the famous attractions in the Kingdom that not only gave them the delight of travel and leisure but also the opportunity to appreciate its rich cultural heritage dating back to Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h)'s time.

OLD JEDDAH AND ITS MYSTIC CHARM AND ARCHITECTURAL WONDERS

Visit to the Old Jeddah Naseef House

The participants were fascinated with the architectural marvels of the Old Naseef House that reflected both tradition and modernity with its 50 ornately decorated rooms. Centrally located in the old city of Jeddah's main street, Suq al-Alawi, it is the temporary residence of King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, the founder of present-day Saudi Arabia. Hearing the echoing calls to prayer for Maghreb from 36 mosques around Naseef House proved to be a fulfilling and unique experience.





Dinner at Coral Beach Jeddah

Watching the traditional Saudi marriage ceremony, participating in folk dancing and being treated to a lavish dinner gave the British youth a lasting memory of the warmth and generosity of Jeddah. Exposure to various cultural minorities and practices overwhelmed the British participants with new found admiration of Saudi culture.

UMRAH AND FUN DESERT ADVENTURE

Pilgrimage to Makkah

Participating in a "little pilgrimage" called the Umrah gave the British Muslim delegates another unique taste of Saudi traditions and enhanced their regard for the faith and religiosity of their Saudi counterparts. Like the Hajj, the Umrah is a form of pilgrimage

where the believers go through a ritual of cleansing and renewal. The visit to Makkah which is the holiest of all cities and which hosts millions of pilgrims from all over the world gave the British youth a firsthand learning experience of the Islamic faith. The others who did not participate in the Umrah went to a fun-filled adventure in the desert and enjoyed some Saudi folk-dancing and a superb dinner in distinctive desert ambience.

RIYADH - EXPLORING ANOTHER SIDE OF SAUDI

The participants also visited the once small walled city of Riyadh which is now a dynamic metropolis and one of the fastest growing and most prosperous cities in the world. It is the seat of political power as well as the hub of commercial activities. The delegates enjoyed the vivacious blend of the old and the new architecture that evoked old





world charm. With deep roots in Islamic tradition and values, participants found Riyadh as more democratically urban.

Al-Faisliyah Tower

Scaling the commercial skyscraper and the second tallest building in Saudi Arabia added fun and excitement to the youth forum activities. Braving the ferocious winds and the bitter cold, the young people played games and watched Riyadh's glittering skyline. Indeed, Riyadh by night is one of the greatest sights in the world.

VISIT TO A MUSEUM IN RIYADH

The visit to the Riyadh Museum of History and Archaeology that celebrates the diverse history and the beautiful architecture and archaeology of Riyadh gave the delegates a glimpse of local art and culture. A short film viewing allowed them to learn more about the history of the Arabian Kingdoms, the Prophet's Mission and the founding father of Kingdom First Saudi Royal. They also marvelled at the exquisite display of many artefacts and other historic items related to the colourful past of Riyadh.

ALL FUN AND NO WORK DESERT STYLE

From a small airport, the participants were flown to a private desert outside of Riyadh airport. They had a chance to spend a full day in the desert. It was a “no work and total fun” day for participants, as they explored the sand dunes, played football on desert sand, and watched the sunset and enjoyed a traditional desert lamb meal in a tent.

In a world where no culture is an island, building trust and understanding through dialogue is increasingly important.” This is the premise upon which the two Kingdoms convention was built

on. The summit was a success in many aspects and successfully achieved its purposes through a number of intercultural activities and events. The conference highlighted the significance of local knowledge and individual cultural practices in order to deepen the understanding of Saudi culture and how to manage intercultural dialogue within and across communities. For British and Saudi youth, this experience was a revelation as the rich cultural and religious heritage of Saudi Arabia dispelled myths, and brought two Kingdoms together in synchronization and peace! ■

