

Foreword

by *Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain*



In the 1960s, the Gulf states experienced a cultural renaissance and the start of intellectual modernization. *Khaleeji* society has evolved over the ensuing 50 years due to four key reasons. First is the progressive vision of civil society. This includes cultural foundations, institutions, clubs, and non-profit organizations as well as poets, sheikhs, thinkers, artists, and writers from the region. They all believe in culture and its value in evolving society's virtues, principles, and wisdom. The second is communication. Across the region, daily editorials, columns, analyses, interviews, TV programs, radio programs and more recently, social media have all focused on cultural activities, and the cultural dimension of these societies has become a facet of daily life. It orients common opinion and adds understanding and value to our view of life.

A third factor that has promoted cultural production and exchange across the GCC region is the development of printing and translation and the explosion of information available to a large segment of the population. Finally, governments of the Gulf states all play an important, central role in promoting local cultural production. Through the allocation of funds and encouragement of local societies, competitions, awards, and other efforts, public institutions have supported a well-entrenched tradition of indigenously-produced arts and culture. Today, the Arabic culture is much more universal than before because it has been disseminated internationally through cultural and civilizational centers for dialogue established in the big historical cities.

My own efforts should be understood within the framework of civil society and corporate social responsibility. In 1989, I established the Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Foundation, which now functions through six bodies: the Prize of Poetic Creativity, the Centre of Intercultural Dialogue, the Institute of Peace, the Centre of Communication, the Centre of Social Development, and the Directorate of Libraries.

We organize and co-organize a number of cultural events with international institutions and finance others, forming a bridge between the Arab world and countries in Africa, Asia, and Europe. Recently, we were honored by re-endowing the Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Laudian Chair in Arabic at the University of Oxford, which is one of seven other chairs ensuring the same mission in different universities in Chad, China, Comoros Islands, France, Italy, Spain, and Togo.

After 25 years, the foundation is known all over the world, and we have organized 15 conferences and sessions in Arabic poetry and intercultural dialogue. We work closely with governmental institutions, international bodies, and NGOs, as the goals of the foundation resonate deeply with their missions. For example, in 2006, during the Foundation's 10th session held in Paris, France, under the auspices of His Excellency

the former French President Jacques Chirac and in coordination with UNESCO, we organized a seminar which was described by the former Director-General of UNESCO Koichiro Matsuura as an “excellent opportunity to reflect on the notion of intercultural dialogue, as well as on the role of the poet in encouraging mutual understanding and respect among cultures.” We are, Matsuura added, “encouraging creativity, and enabling it to flourish in a spirit of diversity and freedom. This is one of the best ways of promoting cultural vitality and sustaining human development.”

Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain is a prominent Kuwaiti businessman and founder of the Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Foundation. He is also a renowned poet and his first book Bawh Al-Bawadi (Intimations of the Desert) was published in 1995. Al-Babtain holds 14 honorary doctorates, has received numerous awards, honors, and medals including the Kuwait Order of the Sash from the Amir of Kuwait, Order of Civil Merit from the King of Spain and National Order of the Cedar from the President of Lebanon.