

## **Qatar- Katara and Unesco launch Cultural Diversity Festival**

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By Raynald C Rivera

Doha: Cross-cultural understanding is without a doubt crucial in the promotion of human dignity tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

The Cultural Diversity Festival launched yesterday by the Cultural Village Foundation-Katara and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) Office in Doha yesterday was built on this premise.

"Understanding intangible cultural heritage and its diversities is crucial to successful international relations as well as to living peacefully. For Unesco cultural diversity is not just international conventions and technical criteria; cultural diversity is a core value of the organisation and at the heart of everything we do" said Anna Paolini Director of Unesco Office in Doha and Unesco Representative in the Arab states of the Gulf and Yemen.

Paolini was speaking at the official opening of the festival yesterday at the Katara Drama Theatre.

"Humanity in fact is built upon the coexistence complementarities and abundance of their cultural diversity. Unesco has identified its role in convening connecting and uniting people of different cultures. Unesco promotes tolerance and respect for diversities of cultures" she stressed.

Probably the biggest and longest festival of its kind hosted by Katara this five-month festival is a vital part of the Intercultural Dialogue and Cultural Diversity Programme of Unesco.

The festival gathers cultural performers from 20 countries representing four continents including Argentina Burkina Faso Cuba Czech Republic Georgia India Italy Kenya Japan Jordan the Philippines Russia Saudi Arabia Senegal Serbia Singapore Spain Tajikistan Turkey and Tunisia.

"We wanted worldwide representation and also diversity therefore we chose countries looking at different communities present in Qatar but also geographical distribution. For example Saudi Arabia will represent the Gulf alongside Qatar Tunisia North Africa Georgia the Caucasus Kenya East Africa Japan the North and Eastern Asia Serbia the Balkans Argentina South America Cuba the Caribbean and so on" explained Paolini.

For the next five months the Cultural Diversity Festival will bring to Qatar world class performances representing the rich and varied cultures from various parts of the world.

"Performing arts such as dance and music represent an important part of our culture that is making our lives more colourful. Learning about other cultures through dance and music helps us to understand and to get to know other cultures" she said.

The festival will provide a way of deepening understanding on the diversity of people from different regions of the world as it bring together custodians of musical tradition and performing arts.

Katara General Manager Dr Khalid bin Ibrahim Al Sulaiti

The audience will have the opportunity to enjoy dances and music which will also include elements that are inscribed on the list of intangible culture and heritage under the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Culture and Heritage such as tango and flamenco.

Two regional conferences on cultural diversity and social inclusion and two national training workshops on intercultural dialogue and Unesco Conventions and declarations will be organised in parallel with the festival.

Calling Qatar "a cradle of diversities of culture" Paolini lauded the country's role in promoting cross-cultural awareness and understanding making it the ideal venue for the festival.

"In the past decade Qatar has become a major crossroad of people and cultures from all over the world. Qatar has become an important player in hosting a multitude of events connecting people from around the globe. This provides Qatar the unique opportunity to foster and promote cross-cultural understanding becoming a global centre of innovation and creativity."

The festival will culminate with the World Day of Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development which is celebrated around the world on May 21 every year bringing world recognition to the issue of cultural diversity cross cultural understanding and the promotion of creativity and innovation.

"Let's celebrate diversity. Cultural diversity is a source of renewal of societies and ideas. It's the backbone of every society. We must strengthen the contribution of culture to promote and respect for human dignity tolerance and pluralism."

The Bayanihan Dancers from the Philippines will be performing at 7.30pm tonight and tomorrow night at the Katara Esplanade. It will be followed by a group from India on January 18 and 19 and Kenya on February 1 and 2.

Katara General Manager Dr Khalid bin Ibrahim Al Sulaiti Under-secretary of Ministry of Education and Higher Education H E Rabia Mohammed Al Kaabi and Ali Abdullah Khalifa Vice-President of International Organisation of Folk Art (IOV) also addressed yesterday's opening event attended by representatives of diplomatic missions in Doha.

"We meet today at this forum in bid to convey the message of love and peace to the world. We are really proud of the fact that Katara is a prominent cultural edifice in the Middle East. This is due to the fact that Katara obtains an international cultural vision that is vividly illustrated through hosting grand cultural events and festivals from all over the world" said Dr Al Sulaiti.

"Undoubtedly Katara has always been distinguished for organizing local traditional events that sought to revive the original Qatari heritage. We are looking forward to enforce international cultural partnerships and mainly with Unesco" he added.

The festival and conferences are set to play an important role in promoting intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity in Qatar within the context of the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013-2022) - a commitment to addressing the need for actions against violence and intolerance and principles such as human dignity conviviality and solidarity.

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