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**Address by Dr Mechtild Rosler, Deputy Director of the Heritage Division of
the Culture Sector of UNESCO on the occasion of the
International Conference on Archaeological Parks and Sites**

Dhofar University, Salalah (Sultanate of Oman), 23 February 2015

Your Excellency Dr. Madiha AlShaibaniya, Minister of Education of the Sultanate of
Oman Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Director-General of UNESCO, it is both a pleasure and an honour to address the distinguished participants of the International Conference on Archaeological Parks and Sites.

At the outset, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to our hosts, the authorities of the Sultanate of Oman. I also would like to extend my appreciation to all those who organized this timely conference, especially ICOMOS Oman.

Oman became a Member State of UNESCO in 1972, the year the World Heritage Convention was adopted by UNESCO's General Conference. In the intervening years, Oman has ratified five of UNESCO's conventions dealing with the protection and conservation of cultural heritage, and has twice served as a member of the World Heritage Committee. During all these years, Oman has striven to safeguard its rich cultural heritage, as demonstrated by the seminar on the country's archaeological heritage entitled "An Early Cradle of Arabian Civilization", held at UNESCO Headquarters in September 2012.. I wish to take this opportunity to thank Oman for its efforts and look forward to further developing our cultural cooperation, especially in the areas of archaeological heritage conservation, the ongoing fight against illicit traffic of cultural objects from looted archaeological sites, and underwater cultural heritage.

Today heritage experts from around the world are convening in one of Oman's major archaeological sites. The Al Baleed Archaeological Park has not only

witnessed a continuous human occupation since the Iron Age until the 15th century B.C. It is also one of the components of the World Heritage site of the “Land of Frankincense”, together with Shisr, Khor Rori and Wadi Dawkah. The archaeological remains of these four sites, their landscape and natural environment are an exceptional testimony to the trade of frankincense, one of the most important luxury items of trade of the ancient and medieval world, from the Mediterranean and Red Sea regions to Mesopotamia, India and China. They demonstrate exceptional heritage routes, a topic that will also be explored at this conference. This openness to the world profoundly marked the history of this region and shaped its people’s culture.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Preserving this exceptional heritage for future generations is a shared responsibility and a tremendous challenge. As you well know, archaeological areas are among the most fragile heritage sites and therefore among the most difficult to protect against threats and risks, be they natural causes, such as earthquakes or linked to damaging human activity, such as looting or encroachment. The value of these sites is not always easy to present to local communities, visitors and young people hence the decision taken by the responsible authorities to develop public information strategies and facilities, such as site museums or interpretation centres, which can raise awareness and generate enhanced community involvement in the management of the sites.

However, these measures can also lead to damage if they are not properly planned and undertaken. It is for instance the case of a number of prehistoric sites whose exceptional value may be evident to specialist but difficult to comprehend by the average tourist or visitor. Making these sites accessible – both physically and intellectually – to the general public while ensuring preservation of the authenticity and integrity is a complex and delicate task, that requires adherence to the highest international standards. Similarly, any “reconstruction” at archaeological sites, especially those that are inscribed on the World Heritage List, on Tentative Lists or are future candidates for World Heritage listing, must take into account all requirements of the Operational Guidelines.

I am sure that these considerations will be at the heart of your debates and I am pleased that UNESCO will take an active part in these discussions, and is willing to take these forward together with its longstanding partners ICOMOS and ICCROM.

I wish you every success in your deliberation and look forward to our conclusions.
Thank you.