Dear Friends,

Another cultural season is drawing to a close and I think we'll all agree it's been a very good year. We'll be publishing the programme for the 14th Cultural Season in the next issue, but I've had a sneak peak and can tell you it promises to be one more of our most dynamic.

Celebrating the 25th anniversary of the DAI raises mixed emotions for me. I am very proud of what's been accomplished in the last quarter century; and a bit sad for the opportunities lost by the destruction of the museum during the Iraqi invasion. Mostly, I am optimistic ...

Have a wonderful summer and I look forward to seeing you all again in the autumn.

Best regards,
Bader al-Baijan
Chairman
DAI Steering Committee

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Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah Celebrates 25th Anniversary

In the interest of promoting cultural understanding and awareness, pieces from the al-Sabah Collection are frequently lent to other museums.

Sheikha Hussah and Sheikh Nasser at the Treasury of the World opening at the Louvre last year
The Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah (DAI) is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. Since its inception in 1983, the DAI has grown from a single focus organization created to manage the loan of the prestigious al-Sabah Collection to the Kuwait National Museum to become an internationally recognised cultural organisation, with a strong focus on education.

Today, the DAI organises an annual lecture series that attracts noted scholars from around the world; produces a quarterly magazine, Hadeeth, and a quarterly newsletter, Bareed; plans and executes travelling exhibitions based on segments of the al-Sabah Collection; participates in thematic exhibitions at museums throughout Europe, Asia and the Americas; hosts seminars on a variety of social/cultural subjects; offers conservation training programmes for interested young Kuwaitis; hosts an interactive cultural awareness programme for children; supports several research and archaeological projects throughout the Middle East; publishes books on art and culture in the Islamic world; hosts an international music circle; and is actively working with the Kuwaiti government to restore the National Museum destroyed during the Iraqi occupation of the country.

The story of the DAI actually starts more than 30 years before, in the 1960s. It was then that Sheikh Nasser Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah discovered an appreciation for Islamic Art. While Sheikh Nasser and Sheikha Hussah were building their collection, the government was completing the construction of the Kuwait National Museum. The couple immediately agreed with the Amir's suggestion that the al-Sabah Collection be displayed in Kuwait's new cultural institution. This was the first step in the transformation of a private collection to an educational tool that helps share the history and culture of the Islamic world with those from the relevant areas and visitors from abroad.

On February 25, 1983 the al-Sabah Collection exhibition opened at the Kuwait National Museum and the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah was born. When the museum was opened by HH the Amir, Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed al-Salem al-Sabah, it was the first purpose build modern museum in the Gulf. The hall housing the al-Sabah Collection had been modified to best meet the needs of the collection.

During the 25 years since then, the quarter century we're celebrating, the organisation survived the Iraqi occupation - diminished in size, but never in spirit. It shifted its focus from museum-based educational programmes to cultural outreach programmes that include the internationally recognised lecture series soon to start its 14th season, Hadeeth ad Dar, Bareed ad Dar, and a number of art/culture specific books.

Of course, we have also organised and executed several travelling exhibitions of our own - including two which are on the programme for the near future. A collection of objects related to the five pillars of Islam is being curated by Dr. Robert Hillenbrand for exhibition at the Hood Museum in the United States in 2010. "Treasury of the World", which opened at the British Museum in May 2001 and toured uninterrupted for six years to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, USA, The Cleveland Museum of Art, USA, The Museum of Fine Arts Houston, USA, The Saint Louis Art Museum USA, Palacio Real-Patrimonio Nacional, Spain, Museum fur Islamische Kunst & Martin Gropius Bau, Germany, is traveling again. It's traveling to a Kremlin museum, where it will open in March 2009.

And while the days of "business as usual" ended with the Iraqi invasion in 1990, the organisation is settling in to its adulthood quite well. At 25, we are wiser and more effective and we will get better - just watch.