

Spring 2013

MBI Al Jaber ● Foundation

# review

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## UNESCO and MBI Al Jaber Foundation join forces to strengthen the education system and support transition in Yemen



*Mrs Irina Bokova, Director General, and HE Sheikh Mohamed Bin Issa Al Jaber, UNESCO Special Envoy for Education, Tolerance and Cultures, launched a project enabling the development of an integrated, sector-wide strategy to address the challenges facing the education sector in Yemen.*

In response to requests made by the Yemeni Government, and in partnership with UNESCO, Sheikh Mohamed Bin Issa Al Jaber, on behalf of the MBI Al Jaber Foundation, has agreed to provide \$1 million to fund a two-year project in Yemen. The project, working with the Yemeni Ministries of Education, Technical and Vocational Education and Higher Education and Research, will be focused on improving and strengthening the education system and its service delivery. It will enable the formulation of a new national vision for education, developing a platform which can support the broad spectrum of the country's educational needs and lead the reform of technical and vocational training, ensuring that the country is delivering a labour force equipped to meet the demands of the labour market.

At current growth rates, the population of Yemen is set to double in just 25 years and with almost 50% of the population under the age of 15, the strain on the education and training systems across the country is considerable. The educational infrastructure required to improve the situation is in a state of disrepair due to the internal conflict, with more than 810 schools having been destroyed or damaged. While there have been improvements in the levels of literacy in Yemen, there is still much to be done.

The agreement was signed at UNESCO Headquarters on 7 February 2013 and implementation will commence during the summer.

The MBI Al Jaber Foundation  
78 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2SJ  
United Kingdom  
Tel: + 44 (0)20 7535 1599  
Fax: + 44 (0)20 7725 0997  
Email: [info@mbifoundation.com](mailto:info@mbifoundation.com)



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## ‘Yemen: Challenges for the Future’ an International Conference hosted by the London Middle East Institute, SOAS.

*The British-Yemeni Society held a two-day conference in January to discuss the challenges facing Yemen.*

The conference, sponsored by the MBI Al Jaber Foundation, brought together academic and professional specialists to discuss recent research on Yemen and the challenges ahead. The conference was opened by HE Sheikh Mohamed Bin Issa Al Jaber, Alan Duncan MP, the UK Minister of State for International Development; Noel Brehony, Chairman of the British-Yemeni Society and Hassan Hakimian the MBI Al Jaber Director of the LMEI.

### Message from the Chairman

It has been a very busy start to the year for the Foundation, and we have been pleased to build upon our partnership with UNESCO through a series of initiatives, including two areas of activity which are featured in this edition of our Review: support for the education system in Yemen at both strategic and project level, and for the cultural heritage of Mali.

We have a long history of support for Yemen, via scholarships and other educational programmes. The country of Yemen faces many challenges but its people have shown, through the National Dialogue, that they are willing to work together for the future and the good of their country and we wish to support them fully in this. Some of our work is featured here, but you can find out more about our various projects, and our activities concerning Mali, on our website.

It is our belief that education is at the core of sustainable stability and peace. Today, more than ever, is the time to act and invest in the future of the people of the Arab world and the MENA region. We believe that education is the most powerful and peaceful solution to help bring down any remaining barriers to freedom and are proud to be making a contribution towards this end.

**Mohamed Bin Issa Al Jaber**  
*Patron and Chairman*



Keynote speeches were given by Dr Abubakr al-Qirbi, Yemeni Foreign Minister and Dr Muhammad al-Saadi, Yemeni Minister of Planning & International Cooperation. Both ministers expressed their sincere gratitude to LMEI and to Sheikh Mohamed for their help and support in organising the conference.

More than eighty delegates attended the Conference Dinner on the evening of 11th January, which took place at SOAS. Guests included leading academics and regional specialists, representatives of the Yemeni Government and the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office.



## Improving Journalism in Yemen



This spring the MBI Al Jaber Foundation travelled to Sana'a, Yemen to prepare for the journalism training Institute we plan to establish there. This will be the first independent school for journalism in the country and an important addition to the growing body of news outlets that have developed since the revolution in 2011. Training will cover print and broadcast media as well as practical instruction.

Much of our time was spent with Abdullah Ghorab, the country's top journalist and an influential figure in Arabic media. We also met with Prime Minister Mohammed Basindawa and the Minister of Information, Ali Al-Imrani.



Another highlight of our visit was seeing alumni of the MBI Al Jaber Foundation post-graduate scholarship programme. These former students are now working in Sana'a with important NGOs and international organisations, helping to improve their communities.

## Help for Mali – The MBI Al Jaber Foundation lends support to the call for the preservation of the country's cultural heritage



Tomb of Askia, Gao by David Sessoms

*The Foundation supports an international meeting of experts to discuss the safeguarding of Mali's cultural heritage.*

The MBI Al Jaber Foundation has played a pivotal role in convening a recent UNESCO conference to discuss the protection of Mali's cultural heritage and to enable the fine-tuning of a definitive plan, which will safeguard the region's ancient tombs, artefacts and manuscripts.

The meeting on 18 February 2013 was opened by Ms Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director General; Ms Aurelie Filippetti, Minister of Culture and Communication of France; Mr Bruno Maiga, Minister of Culture of Mali and HE Mr Solomon Jason Mbuji, Chairman of UNESCO Africa Group, and Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Zambia to UNESCO.

The meeting began with a status report on Mali's cultural heritage and went on to consider the possible responses to the current crisis. During the final session, the UNESCO plan of action and associated budget was discussed in detail to ensure that the efforts of the international community, and other partners, would be coordinated effectively and efficiently. The conference was followed by a concert including artists from Mali and the wider region.

Since May of 2012, the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Timbuktu and Gao have been repeatedly attacked by Islamic militants and, as a result, have suffered considerable damage. Eleven of the sixteen tombs in Timbuktu have been destroyed and it is estimated that some 2000 to 3000 ancient manuscripts have been burned. The current fear is that artefacts and manuscripts will be illicitly trafficked - smuggled from Mali and eventually sold on the black market to interested parties.

## Mali in Transition: Interdisciplinary Perspectives.

Organised by the Centre of African Studies and SOAS, University of London, the MBI Al Jaber Foundation was a key sponsor for this two-day conference in central London. Participants included academics, aid workers, policy strategists, and artisans. Four panels focused on the following themes:

- Interdisciplinary perspectives on the crisis
- Emergency crisis and impact of humanitarian action
- Heritage and conservation
- Historical perspectives and future scenarios



A range of material was presented. Highlights included a joint presentation by Mohamed Alher Ag Almahdi, a Malian Tuareg manuscript conservationist and David Jacobs, a senior conservationist at the British Library. Together they discussed their collaboration on the restoration of ancient books in Timbuktu. Julian Richards, another notable presenter, hosted a screening of his 2006 film, *With the Nomads*, a documentary about nomadic life in West Africa.

### The MBI Al Jaber Foundation on Social Media

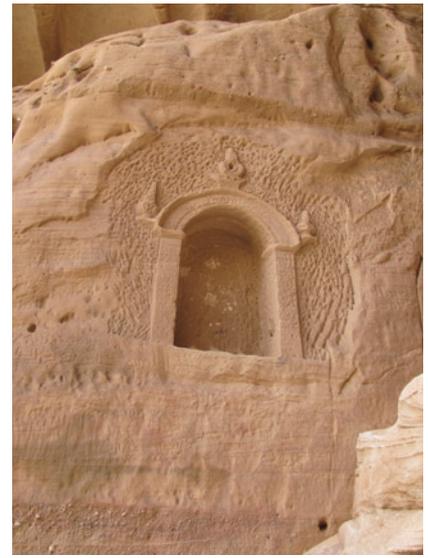
The MBI Al Jaber Foundation has a new Facebook page, so please 'Like' us and you'll be able to keep up to date with all of our activities and let us know about yours. We are also on Twitter @MBIFoundation, and have a YouTube channel too: [www.youtube.com/user/MBIAJaberFoundation](http://www.youtube.com/user/MBIAJaberFoundation)

Stay in touch!



[www.mbifoundation.com](http://www.mbifoundation.com)

## British Foundation for the Study of Arabia



The MBI Al Jaber Foundation has been supporting the international Seminar for Arabian Studies at the British Museum for the past 11 years. Two years ago the Seminar came under the umbrella of the newly formed British Foundation for the Study of Arabia (BFSA), and the Foundation is pleased to be able to continue to support the Seminar and the BFSA, including sponsorship of the annual bulletin (formerly the Bulletin of the Society for Arabian Studies) which gives information on current research, publications, field work, conferences and events in the Arabian peninsula in fields ranging from archaeology and history to natural history and the environment. It also carries feature articles and book reviews.

This year's Seminar will be held at the British Museum on Friday 26th, Saturday 27th and Sunday 28th July 2013. More information on the Seminar can be found here:

[www.thebfsa.org/content/seminar-arabian-studies](http://www.thebfsa.org/content/seminar-arabian-studies)

### MBI Al Jaber Public Lecture

The MBI Al Jaber Public Lecture, 2013 will be on the subject of 'Arab Navigation'. The lecture, on 27 July 2013 at 18:30, in the BP Lecture Theatre, British Museum, will be delivered by Dr Anthony Constable. Dr Constable's work focuses on celestial navigation techniques employed by famous Arab voyagers in the 15th and 16th century, such as Ahmad ibn Majid and Sulayman al-Mahri. Tickets are free, but places are limited so must be booked in advance.

Tickets can be obtained through the British Museum's booking office: **+44 (0)20 7323 8181** or [tickets@britishmuseum.org](mailto:tickets@britishmuseum.org)