

Press release

Paris, December 6, 2021

France and Saudi Arabia sign an intergovernmental agreement for the creation in AIUla of a cultural institution of reference dedicated to the arts, the Villa Al-Hajar

In April 2018, Saudi Arabia and France signed an intergovernmental agreement on the sustainable development of the AIUla region and its transformation into a world-class cultural and tourist destination.

Born from this agreement, the French Agency for the Development of AIUla (AFALULA) aims to mobilize all French expertise (experts, operators, companies) and to support, in a spirit of co-construction, its Saudi partner, the Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU).

The Agency brings together some of the world's best experts in all the key areas of the project: museography, archaeology, architecture and urban planning, agriculture and botany, tourism, education, infrastructure, horses, security, water and environmental management.

The joint desire of Saudi Arabia and France is to implement, through the AIUla project, a new model of economic and touristic development focused on the preservation of the environment, respectful of history, territories and inclusive of the local population. This component of sustainable development is at the heart of the bilateral agreement signed between the two nations.

During the visit of the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Jeddah), on 4 December 2021, an intergovernmental agreement was signed between France and Saudi Arabia for the creation of a reference cultural institution, Villa Al-Hajar, in AIUla.

“The signing of this bilateral agreement between our two nations, concerning the development in AIUla of a cultural institution of reference dedicated to arts and culture, seals the artistic dialogue initiated between France and Saudi Arabia and, more broadly, between European and Arab cultures. Villa Al-Hajar is the symbol of an encounter between the heart of the Arab world and the French creative spirit.”
Gérard Mestrallet, Executive Chairman of AFALULA

The intergovernmental agreement signed for the creation of a Villa Al-Hajar aims for the development of a cultural institution of reference dedicated to the arts

An intergovernmental agreement has been sealed to create a Villa Al-Hajar in AIUla inspired by the most prestigious French cultural institutions in the world. It will present creative, cultural and intellectual activities, and bring together the best of France and Saudi Arabia for an international and local audience.

Villa Al-Hajar will emanate from the principles set out in the intergovernmental agreement signed in April 2018 between Saudi Arabia and France, also embodied by the close collaboration between the Royal Commission for AIUla and the French Agency for the Development of AIUla.

Rooted in AIUla's exceptional heritage, this institution will base its action on the French and Saudi cultural wealth. Through its abundant activity, Villa Al-Hajar will engage in an artistic dialogue between



France and Saudi Arabia and, more broadly, between European and Arab cultures. This institution will thus contribute to the cultural richness of AIUla as well as to its ambition to become a world-renowned cultural and artistic center.

Villa Al-Hajar aims to become a nursery of artists and creators that will be structured around several complementary cultural spaces. It will promote the awakening of the artistic senses through the implementation of ambitious projects, and will contribute positively and actively to the world cultural scene. A meeting place between the local community and an international audience, it will highlight the emerging Saudi and European art scene.

Villa Al-Hajar is the symbol of an encounter; it is this meeting place where the heart of the Arab world welcomes the French creative spirit.

About AFALULA (French Agency for the Development of AIUla)

Born from an intergovernmental agreement signed by France and Saudi Arabia in April 2018, the French Agency for the Development of AIUla (Afalula) was founded in Paris in July 2018. Afalula aims to support, in a spirit of co-construction, its Saudi partner, the Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU), in the sustainable economic, touristic and cultural development of AIUla, a region with an exceptional natural and cultural heritage located in the Northwest of Saudi Arabia. The agency's mission is to mobilize all French know-how and expertise and to bring together the best operators and companies in the fields of archaeology, museography, architecture, urban planning, tourism, hospitality, infrastructure, education, security, agriculture, botany and sustainable management of natural resources.

About RCU (Royal Commission for AIUla)

The Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU) was established by Royal Decree in July 2017 to preserve and develop AIUla, a region with outstanding natural and cultural heritage, located in northwestern Saudi Arabia. The RCU's long-term plan takes a sensitive, sustainable and responsible approach to urban and economic development in order to preserve the natural and historical heritage of the region, while making AIUla a privileged place where it is possible to live, work and visit. The plan encompasses numerous initiatives in the fields of archaeology, tourism, culture, education and the arts, to address different priorities in economic diversification, empowerment of local communities and the preservation of heritage, as part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 agenda.

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