

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Ever Merciful

The Role of Cultural Heritage in Underpinning Understanding among Nations

Introduction:

Culture has been defined as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capacities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”.

It is an intellectual and moral activity that springs from most profound human feelings, an activity that keeps abreast of time from which it derives an ability to move on. An intellectual activity is a not mere effort to comprehend and reproduce information in accord with a constant pattern; rather, it is a behavior based on creativity and revival that ultimately aim to ameliorate and fix the humanitarian situation in a bid to wipe off its bleakness.

Culture is a key mainstay of human cohesion and modus Vivendi (way of life). One may well have an orientation towards a country and/or a people by learning about their culture. Dogmas and ideologies are always infused into minds by means of cultural, intellectual, artistic and scholarly rapprochement.

Further, life has a general system to it, and culture is an integral part of this system. Therefore, the overall social system and culture are interchangeably affecting each other. Besides, culture balks and gets inflicted with the malaises of emaciation, weakness, poverty, and/or backwardness, according to contemporary terminology.

Cultural diversity is a driving force for development not only in terms of economic growth, but also in terms of leading a consummate intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual life as enshrined in the international conventions on culture, which provide a solid ground for reinforcing such a kind of diversity.

Thus, cultural diversity is an essential means to reduce poverty, achieve sustainable development and shore up understanding among nations; it is also regarded as an effective tool that close the gap existing between peoples and culture, let alone being an imperative for maintaining peace and enhancing rapport among countries.

In case a nation is not in charge of its own affairs, as one African struggler Frantz Fanon said, then it will be beset by the tribulations of deformity, distortion and destruction; therefore, it should keep resisting and resisting till it gets its own willpower and stamina, tints its culture with its own spirit and unique sap.

Hence, a political action turns out to be a cultural activity leading to the creation of culture.

Significance of culture:

Culture is increasingly gaining significance, as it plays a pivotal role in pushing forward rapprochement and dialogue among various cultures. It seeks to meet the noble goal of forging a consensus on the creation of a cultural civilization that encourages better understanding among peoples by means of communication and understanding.

Dialogue of civilizations has largely drawn great attention from researchers and cultural think-tanks, particularly as it is conducted in a war-ravaged world. Therefore, dialogue serves as a panacea for all the crises facing the world countries, hence the importance of culture.

Intercultural dialogue is indispensable to all humanity, especially if it is willing to avert negative conflicts rather than the civilizational repelling among nations, which is originally a Divine tenet.

Dialogue among rivals, which is based on a rightful approach, should prevail among civilizations and cultures provided that it meets the conditions for understanding, co-existence, justice and equality. In addition, all stakeholders must be fully convinced that the dialogue of civilizations is the most optimal means to circumvent the problems of wars, conflicts and terrorism, which should be rightly defined and conceptualized away from exaggerations, pretexts and unjust judgments.

Moreover, the dialogue of civilizations has become a universal phenomenon, a pressing need felt by many agencies keen to achieve safe human co-existence, to stave off wars and catastrophes and to address the effects of same on security, human dignity and the environmental integrity.

More importantly, intercultural dialogue promotes rapport, reinforces understanding, gives rise to affection and cordiality, establishes friendships and contributes to the maintenance of peace and security of nations.

The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity adopted in 2001 recognizes that cultural diversity is the common heritage of humanity; it also acknowledges the potential of inter-cultural dialogue. The preamble to the Declaration states that “Culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs”.

This Declaration was supplemented in 2005 by the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Article 1 of the same Convention states thus: “Cultural diversity can be protected and promoted only if human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression, information and communication, as well as the ability of individuals to choose cultural expressions, are guaranteed”.

Like any other nations that cherish and value its cultural heritage, Africa and Arab world have rich and deep-rooted cultural patrimony that is inextricably correlated to originality and novelty, thereby forming one of the most important sources of culture.

Such a cultural tide is of yet another importance to Afro-Arab identity that had over centuries drawn from the long history of Afro-Arab relations, which prompted it to preserve its deep-seated constituents that catch up with its status among the nations inspired by their shiny past but never overlook their regrettable present. However, these nations are till aspiring for a better future that keeps pace with the rising generations’ ambitions for a better life and a broader cultural ambiance.

However, the issue of keeping up with the developments of the current age never means that we should turn our backs on our scientific, cultural and intellectual past, and instead pant for new and contemporary things that never yield fruitful results in favor of our culture. Indeed, it is no important to hanker after every novel thing due to its modernity, though worthless. Rather, what is important is to utilize both the old and modern in as much as they add to our intellectual repertoire in such a way as to bolster our scientific and cultural environment.

The spirit of normal relations among people opens the door to auxiliary ties that rest on the nature of reciprocal ties among these people. Some communities find it difficult to co-exist owing to some historic distinctions and turning points they had experienced in the past. On the contrary, other communities may establish natural relations with one another, particularly in case these ties are of cognitive, illuminating and cultural nature, or pertaining to the construction of joint Afro-Arab cultural entity that requires buttressing cultural bonds among Arabs and Africans, including intellectuals.

Furthermore, Afro-Arab culture can co-exist with other contemporaneous cultures only when we pay attention to the subject based on the objective vision of deriving benefits from such cultures in such a manner that never harms national identity. It is incumbent upon Arab and African nations to prevent their beliefs melting away into any other cults and to keep their values from fusing into other traditions. They have to awaken their brilliant past, revive their civilizational record and integrate themselves into the age, not just standing at the threshold of history or remaining nostalgic for the past. The once shining glory that had vanished in the past wouldn't return back, except if we keep pace with the dynamics of the age, and stick to our well-ingrained legacy. This means that we should set the objectives we wish to attain and to build a new road to the glory by creating a reality that elevates us to the ranks of the advanced nations.

Cultural legacy occupies a vital place in all countries as it represents their cultures and civilizations, helps connect the citizens with each other, and grants them a sense of belongingness to common origins and noble goals. In addition, archeological landmarks, relics and antiquities constitute one of the key factors in establishing an economic base, particularly in the tourist sector, for a country just like Yemen. Therefore, the preservation of cultural heritage has become a necessity.

Chapter one-From Concept to Institutional Presence- of ASSECAA's book titled "Vision and Achievements", which was issued in May 2013, outlined the justifications for the establishment of the Association as follows:

-Enhancing cooperation between Africa and Arab world while respecting cultural diversity, and contributing to dialogue on democracy and the rule of law.

-Consolidating the status of African and Arab countries amongst other nations, particularly in the light of the changes the world is currently witnessing at all levels,

especially as the culture of globalization dictates new trends of integration and harmony among countries with common action potentials.

-Contributing effectively to the elimination of causes of tension and violence as well as the achievement of peace, security and stability in Africa, the Middle East and the world at large.

-Backing the efforts at fighting poverty and famine, eradicating all forms of backwardness, and reinforcing the role of women in attaining overriding, sustainable development in all countries.

Cultural heritage:

Heritage is usually defined as a set of cultural components which are transmitted from one generation to another. These largely reflect their own cultural sustainability in terms of time and setting. Besides, legacy includes proverbs, sayings, and tales in addition to visible actions and practices. In other words, it is the legacy of physical artifacts (**cultural property**) and intangible attributes of a group or **society** that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations.

Though the term “ Cultural heritage” has increasingly become familiar, many still don’t know what is it and why should we preserve it? The term has changed content considerably in recent decades. Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as **oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe.**

Cultural heritage can be categorized into two types:

1-Cultural property:

It is the intellectual legacy which is composed of what ancestors, including scholars, thinkers, artists and creative people, who served as witnesses on their eras, had left behind such as masterpieces and manuscripts indicative of their existence.

In other words, it includes antiquities, such as archeological sites, fossils and other masterpieces lodged at museums symbolic of different settings and eras.

This type of heritage involves historic buildings and places, antiquities, masterpieces etc., which should be preserved properly in order to be transmitted to the next generations. It also includes distinctive finds that meet the criteria of archeology, architecture, science and technology. Such finds are very important for studying human history, as they constitute the key pillar of thoughts that can be authenticated.

A conservation of archeological discoveries implies a tacit admission of the importance of the past as well as the implications of its events. The preserved finds are indicative of authentic memories as well as the validity of discovered objects that prevent their replication or replacement. Further, they point people to the right way of communicating with the past. Unfortunately, however, these finds are usually running the risk of being touched by tourists or exposed to light while on display, in addition to other dangers emanating from the introduction and exhibition of antiques.

Worse still, finds usually run the risk of chemical metamorphism, in the sense that what we consider as safeguarded and preserved is ever changing or susceptible to constant change. Moreover, the feature of change is a yardstick for the value each generation is to add up to the past as well as to the masterpieces.

2-Intangible Cultural heritage:

It is also called social heritage that includes lifestyle, attitudes, discipline, behaviors, customs and habits, proverbs, traditions and social value system. It also covers handicrafts, artifacts, and architecture. It also comprises traditions or forms of live expressions inherited from forbearers and exchanged by successive generations. These include verbal expressions, show arts, social practices, rituals, festivals and other practices related to the nature and universe, as well as the information and skills related to traditional handicrafts.

Further, intangible cultural heritage is not restricted to past traditions; rather, it includes contemporary rural and urban practices shared by various cultural groups. It is an all-encompassing legacy, as the forms of expressions we practice may well be corresponding to those practiced by others who may either hail from nearby villages, or remote cities or have migrated to and settled in different areas. Anyway, various forms

of expressions are regarded an intangible cultural heritage, which was passed on from one generation to another; these forms evolved in response to previous generations' environment, thereby giving us a sense of identity and continuity and serving as a link between the past, the present and the future.

This type of legacy never raises questions about whether or not some practices are peculiar of a particular culture; it contributes to reinforcing social cohesion and feeds a sense of belongingness and responsibility, a matter that further galvanizes individuals' sense of belongingness to a specific local community or various local communities and that they are one in the same.

In view of the significance of the cultural heritage, the International intergovernmental committee for the Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, a UNESCO-run body, resolved during its sixth session held on the Indonesian island of Bali in 2011, to place new components of heritage on its list consisting of over 200 components of intangible cultural heritage in a dire need of urgent safeguarding. This brought to 29 the number of cultural heritage elements from only 9 countries, which need be urgently safeguarded. The representative intangible cultural heritage list consists of 232 elements from some 70 countries. Still, there is a list of the best safeguarding practices. States parties to the Convention on the Preservation of Intangible Cultural heritage are entitled to nominate their cultural heritage components for placement on the said list. There have so far been 139 countries signatory to the convention adopted by the UNESCO conference held in 2003. The Intergovernmental Committee for Safeguarding the Intangible Heritage is made up of 24 members who are elected by the general assembly of the states parties to the convention and half of whom have their terms of office renewed every two years.

It is worth mentioning that UNESCO, backed by the EU, undertook the Live Mediterranean heritage project for the enforcement of the Convention on the safeguarding of cultural heritage in several countries, with the participation of France-based World Cultures House.

In spite of the fragile character of the intangible cultural heritage, it forms a key factor in preserving cultural diversity in the face of the rising tempo of globalization. An understanding of the intangible cultural heritage of various local communities helps out inter-cultural dialogue and encourages mutual respect for *modus Vivendi* of others. Also, the significance of this heritage doesn't lie in its cultural demonstration per se;

rather, it lies in the voluminous information and skills it carries over from one generation to another.

Cultural heritage represents the history of a world that has almost forgotten its own legacy. It is only subject to the criteria of absolute diversity rather than to strident yardsticks. What we aspire to achieve here is to be conscious of the cultural bets of past generations that left for us a legacy that we should seriously understand in order to be able to meet the new developments in an open-ended and dynamic framework.

We should also take into account that it is only the unique cultural character that survived existential conflict despite the fact that we are fully aware that the intangible cultural legacy is merely an ephemeral universal language that remained intact due to mankind's love and attachment thereto. Therefore, the UNESCO asserted the role of language and local dialects as a vehicle carrying the intangible cultural heritage whose fields, including universe-related knowledge, rituals, customs and handicrafts, all involve elements transmitted over centuries through language, given that the experiences pertaining to group identities reflect on their language lexicon.

Transmission and Conservation:

Defining cultural heritage entails mentioning the issue of transmission and conservation as manifested in the definition of heritage. Heritage is a legacy that is passed on from one generation to another. Therefore, transmission and inheritance are a prerequisite for considering a cultural item a heritage. Regardless of its past value and importance, heritage needs to be discovered, preserved and revived and displayed in order for it to remain effective and live in such a way as to open up new avenues for people.

Antiquities are the most outstanding and immortal elements of cultural heritage in addition to being the most representative of internal cultural changes. Archeological leftovers are a product of man's conflict with his environment, and signal the amount of his efforts to exploit such a milieu. Besides, relics differ from one country to another depending on the environment and social characteristics. Thus, antiquities serve as cultural documents reflecting the civilization of a nation and express its identity; they also remind us of the values that guided our ancestors, revive the spirit of the past amongst us and galvanize awareness of its originality that basically links the past with the future.

Preservation:

The preservation of cultural heritage connotes the preservation thereof. The basic value of heritage lies in the fact that it stands for a nation's patrimony, wisdom, collective sense and its unity inherited from the past, which contributes to the creation of its awareness in the present.

Therefore, a nation is unlikely to make use of its heirloom except if it felt the need to recognize it, strived for self-quest and prepared itself for shouldering the responsibility of transmitting same to next generations. In a sense, a country must preserve its cultural patrimony before it is too late as a prelude to passing it on to the next generation. Also, a country must preserve its legacy before it is too late, as it is pointless to start talking about the conservation of heritage after it has decayed or spoiled. It is also worthless to talk about a heritage while at the same time not realizing its value, as patrimony is something inherited from forbearers, which we appreciate most, and work hard towards transmitting it to the upcoming generations.

Preservation of legacy has two connotations to it: the first implies the protection of antiquities, monuments and archeological sites.

It also means preserving antiquities, landmarks and historic sites i.e. keeping them intact as transmitted to us. This also implies they should remain unchanged and devoid of any distortions, in addition to preventing them from being plundered, stolen and or smuggled.

Further, Antiquities are not on the increase, rather they are in decrease owing to pillage, sabotage, and urbanization. Hence, there is need to preserve antiques that would serve as a impeccable record of ancient human development in an ever-changing environment.

The second implication is that legacy, which is a background to our civilization, must be revived by means of exposing and repairing it based on scientific methods. It should also be collected, projected, studied and propagated. More importantly, legacy items, such as masterpieces and relics, should be registered and documented in order to make them explicable and profoundly conceptual. It also indicates making best use of, and encouraging reproduction of legacy.

Preservation in this sense doesn't mean packaging legacy for a romantic and logical desire enkindled by nostalgia for the past, or for the sake of shooting an exciting film to appease tourists, or because the preservation of folk legacy is a sort of entertainment, vogue and/or a pastime for a group of wealthy people. Rather, we preserve heritage in order to protect our identity.

We have become fully conscious of the fact that our life is a logical development of the past. Therefore, patrimony should be expressive of the nation where we live, its collective memory, and the interplay between modern day inventions and the valuables of the past. Accordingly, we can recognize the bond of emotional affiliation and the implication of spiritual settlement.

We must point out two significant points related to the concept of cultural heritage preservation when it comes to archeological sites, historic landmarks, zones and cities. The first is the appreciation of the significance of heritage; the second is determining the type of preservation process. It is no easy to appreciate the importance of the milestones that should be conserved, as this issues needs knowledge, taste and experience in numerous fields such as history, arts, architecture history, archeology, engineering, urban planning, anthropology, etc. Prior to this, there should be agreed specific yardsticks for determining the importance of landmarks in order for it to be called “heritage landmark” that applies fully to the concept of legacy we seek to preserve.

Scholars are unanimous that a legacy milestone must have four basic criteria, including aesthetic value, historic value, scientific value and social value. -Aesthetic value: A normal taste and inspirational impression based on broad cultural background.

Historic value:

A profound knowledge of the significance of historic monuments expressive of specific human activity or historic phase, as they embody a genuine image of the past. /

Scientific value:

Landmarks and monuments have scientific values, as they can provide rare information on technical developments to the advantage of researchers.

Social value:

Legacy has social values. Monuments and relics , such as shrines , are religiously significant. They may symbolize the past or serve as a lesson for the people of reason.

The appreciation of legacy is often relative, and is governed by several factors, such as awareness, will and potentials. Ultimately, however, the most important of such factors is the official consensus on the importance of legacy.

Some may think that calls for the preservation of legacy and traditional values are either Salafistic or reactionary. However, this is unjust and prejudicial judgment, as how can we grasp the nomenclature of heritage that connotes transmission and continuity?

Taking care of legacy is not a profound nostalgia for, or illusive return to the past, nor is it an ideal state of apostasy. Rather, it is a normal thing. It is a continued transmission of authentic patrimony usually called “wisdom ensconced in the consciousness of a nation, the ethos of the people and national character, in addition to the fact that we become aware of our heritage only when enter the age and take part in its developments.

Originality is achieved through modernity. In as much as one takes full cognizance of the circumstances of the age, he/she would become fully aware of his status in the world.

As we live in developing societies that need to utilize science and technology as a contemporary form of future heritage, we feel that we have an adequate amount of maturity that enable us to preserve our cultural identity in a tumultuous world dominated by supreme cultures that are potentially capable of uprooting feeble ones, whose people are oblivious to the tools of enhancing and advocating same.

ASSECAA member states’ cultural legacy , with its diverse dimensions, is either intangible such as antiquities and other human cultural leftovers , in-kind and intangible, or tangible heritage inherited by successive generations. Like other world countries, ASSECAA member countries’ tangible and intangible heritage runs the risk of being obliterated due to the increasing effects of globalization as in the case of other world countries that have recently discerned the significance of cultural heritage in establishing the pillars of society, projecting its identity, and building up bridges of intercultural dialogue in a conflict-ridden world.

As cultural legacy is unique and irreplaceable, we must take the onus of preserving and safeguarding it, and spreading awareness of the dangers to such patrimony.

As ASSECAA member countries, like other world countries, are being influenced by globalization whose future consequences are unanticipated, we should admit that our ability to learn about cultural heritage, which is integral to our national identity, has become too limited. Hence, we should not blame people for this, as their ability to learn about all the elements of their legacy is a daunting task, in addition to the dearth of the personnel specialized in safeguarding and preserving heritage as well as the scarcity of technological devices that enable these employees do their job in full.

We face the challenge of training and educating researchers in such a manner as to cultivate their linguistic, curricular and scientific skills and aptitudes, and augment their knowledge of local and regional legacy, and help them gain the systematic work mechanisms that enable them carry out relevant studies and gather accurate information in a scientific and objective manner.

The responsibility of ASSECAA member states, including their private and public institutions, towards cultural heritage involves raising the awareness of citizens and those working in the field of the importance of cultural heritage. For example, meetings can be held for the purpose of assessing what has been done in terms of preserving local and international cultural heritage. Arabs and Africans can also consider the possibility of coordinating the process of documenting and conducting researches on cultural heritage, and demanding museums to set up cultural heritage sections, and creating a regional website on which to publish information on cultural heritage after securing an agreement to the effect with ASSECAA member countries signatory to relevant international conventions. New administrative structures can be created, taking into account that the existing ones, especially those whose functions overlap with those of the institutions concerned with cultural heritage. Changes can also be introduced into educational system programs intended for disseminating information on the elements of intangible cultural heritage, especially those related to the subjects of history, community and national education.

Indeed, the task of instilling the concepts of cultural legacy into the minds of youth is a lofty one, as they are regarded the builders of society and standard-bearers of cultural heritage. The introduction of such concepts into textbooks and the conduct of university

competitions related to heritage would have far-reaching effects on the preservation of national legacy.

The role that can be played by civil society organization in conserving cultural heirloom cannot be overemphasized. We should not also be oblivious to the fact that a magazine to be designed for gathering information on the niceties and nuances of cultural heritage must be established in order to help researchers on cultural heritage find the sought after information.

In this regard, legislators and decision-makers in ASSECAA member countries must hold meetings involving researchers, media persons and people from all walks of life with an aim to call for the preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage. Also, media organizations must bear a greater responsibility for diffusing the concepts of cultural heritage, encouraging people to take positive positions towards same, and explaining the importance of cultural legacy in promoting mutual dialogue and understanding amongst peoples. In the same vein, development institutions have a vital role to play in terms of emphasizing the significance of cultural heritage in achieving sustainable development and rapprochement among nations. To this end, cultural heritage in ASSECAA member countries must be given an institutional dimension in such a way that ensures laying down overriding cultural policies aimed at the achievement of some sort of development that ensures exerting concerted efforts at the preservation of legacy in an atmosphere prevailed by the spirit of joint cooperation.

Legislation:

Any talk of heritage entails debating policies, legislations, plans and programs that should be undertaken by the competent authorities, scientific and cultural institutions. It also involves talking about unofficial efforts as well as regional and international cooperation meant to develop scientific and empirical practices that preserve and revive legacy. This is because the preservation of heirloom is a collective responsibility. Indeed, heritage is a public property that may intersect with genuine cultural properties; it is an integral part of the public sector rather than the private sector.

An antiquity, which is a public property, may be located on a land owned by an individual. So, how can we reconcile a nation's legacy with an individual property?

Can this problem be resolved through the might of the state or the rule of law?

Can it be solved via corporate or individual responsibility?

Can it be resolved by transferring possession from public to private?

Every individual or government institution is accountable for preserving past legacy. This presupposes teaching people, children and the elderly, how to preserve heritage and enforce legacy preservation laws, regulations and policies with an aim to encourage the general public to assume their duty towards patrimony and its values as is the practice in the other regions of the world of which our Africa and Arab region is part and parcel. No doubt, we are bound, before anybody else, to call for the conservation of our heritage, a call that has become the major concern of this particular age.

Taking interest in legacy is the centerpiece of cultural and environmental institutions the world over, given that heritage is a record on mankind's relation to the world as well as past discoveries and developments. The loss of heirloom, however, is on the increase.

The removal of archeological landmarks would mean the loss of significant monuments that testify to social creativity, and of the rudiments of knowledge necessary for building up the future. Lost legacy is past redemption and this why heirloom should be preserved properly. Fortunately, however, the loss of cultural heritage can, more often than not, be averted. Therefore, the issue of preserving and safeguarding cultural heritage in an effective and efficient manner should be based on the understanding of the issues related to the civilizational legacy as well as a proper assessment of same, in addition to taking convenient measures in order to reduce the scale and size of damage or loss to a minimum.

Cultural legacy can be conserved through the enactment of legislations that guarantee the conservation of both local immovable cultural properties, including landmarks and archeological sites, and movable antiquities that can be collectively preserved or placed in convenient museums.

The legislations must cover property ownership in general and the possession of land on which archeological sites are located. Indeed, the possession and exploitation of land give the landlord the right to make use of surface and underground relics and antiquities, but don't authorize him to unearth and explore for antiques.

Some may take the matter for granted; however, many countries consider the individual ownership as a top-most priority. They don't see heritage, including relics, manuscripts

and historic milestones, as public property. Instead, the state endeavors to conserve such landmarks in cooperation with concerned citizens.

For instance, one former US lawmaker once said : “Though the individual rights may be restricted by the community right in terms of developing and exploiting private ownership, an individual , at any rate, is authorized to get economic benefits or compensations for lost property in case legislations are in favor of public rights”.

It is therefore necessary to enact and enforce clear-cut legislations to preserve legacy and cultural properties. Of these legislations are:

1-Antiquity protection law

2-Historical manuscripts and documents protection law.

3-Folk legacy protection law.

4-Natural heritage protection law. This may be disputable.

5-Participation in signing and ratifying international agreements on the protection of legacy and cultural properties, such as The UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property , which was adopted on Nov.14, 1970 ,and subsequent conventions.

Of the most important measures that should be taken in terms of enforcing legacy protection laws is the registration and documentation of antiquities for the purpose of preventing them from being looted, stolen and/or smuggled abroad. This involves including antiquities in the national register on cultural legacy by putting tags on legacy items and giving them special names. This is to prove public ownership of antiquities and restore the items illegally sold locally or abroad. The national register should indicate the names and titles of different items as the first step to preserving heritage. Just as it is well said that history lacks documents, it can also be said that history has neither documents nor proofs.

The already existing laws on the preservation of cultural heritage, at the local, regional and international level, should be reactivated, and the relevant international conventions ratified because they are so necessary for the conservation of cultural legacy. Indeed, any man-made laws or systems, which are related to any aspect of life, should be subject to an organizational and legislative pattern that ensures its success and

productivity for the betterment of the country. There may well be a need to enact laws recognizing that cultural heritage can play a pivotal role in achieving national development and preserving national identity, including by compiling, translating and inventorying relevant information on the constituents of cultural heritage in ASSECAA member countries. The move would certainly produce a legal framework that determines the responsibility of the state, citizens and other organizations concerned with the conservation of cultural heritage.

Moreover, cultural heritage law is highly important as it sets out mechanisms for nominating cultural items to be designed as cultural heritage components, in addition to the provision of legal advocacy for our legacy at the local and regional level in such a way that is conducive to its genuine environment. In other words, cultural heritage plays a significant role in enhancing rapport between groups and individuals living in the same community one the one hand, and among nations on the other, let alone the fact that it represents a rich natural resource.

The enactment of legislation on cultural heritage should take into account the unwritten customs and traditions that galore, especially as each and every tribe has its own conventions and norms. Attempts at the documentation of these traditions are considered a priority, because they seek to find out about common denominators among such customs in a bid to frame same for the purpose of preserving cultural heritage and spreading awareness thereof.

Our cultural vision should be based on the fact that all cultures are an integral part of mankind's common legacy and that the cultural identity of each nation is renewed and enriched by means of communicating and interacting with the culture and heritage of other nations. Further, as per the recommendations from the International intergovernmental conference for cultural policies, held in Mexico in 1982, cultural identity can pine away or rather die altogether when isolated.

It should also be focused on respect for all cultures while emphasizing the basic nature of nations' and communities' identity and its relationships to that of other cultures.

Out of firm belief in the significance of cultural communication as well as the building of informational and intellectual bridges among nations, cultural interplay among world communities ought to be enhanced in order to elevate the understanding of distinctions

among different cultures and emphasize the unity of mankind irrespective of races and ethnicities.

The principles of crystallizing and framing common legislation on cultural heritage can be summed up as follows:

1-Legitimate reciprocation of historical and cultural qualities, which enriches social and cultural existence of nations and people, and enhances mutual respect, affection and friendship among them.

2- A nation's movable cultural heritage is regarded as a basic component of its culture and civilization, in addition to being an integral part of universal human culture. This requires a regional cooperation on fighting theft and smuggling of cultural properties.

3-Safeguarding and preserving historic cultural properties against the dangers of illegal excavations, thievery and smuggling, which is the duty of governments.

4-Clandestine diggings at archeological sites, larceny, illegal importation and exportation of cultural objects constitute a key reason for lack of such properties in the countries of origin.

5-Setting up a good system for conserving immovable cultural heritage and enhancing coordination and cooperation among the institutions concerned with combating the theft and trafficking of cultural properties.

6-Documentation, preparation and inventorying of national cultural properties.

7-Convenient oversight of archeological excavations and standardizing the tools of preserving cultural properties at discovery sites.

8-Practical steps must be taken to boost public awareness of the necessity of safeguarding public properties.

9-Educational, scientific and technical institutions should be encouraged to preserve cultural objects, upgrade and expand museums and support cooperation on preserving and exchanging cultural properties among Afro-Arab museums.

10-There should be issued security clearances allowing the export of some cultural objects while at the same time banning the illegal exportation of unlicensed items that should be repatriated to the country of origin if exported illegally.

11-Enhancing international cooperation on fighting the smuggling of cultural objects with the countries of origin, and working towards repatriating smuggled items , and bringing those accused of running them to account.

12-Confirming the inalienable right , in each and every country, to the classification of cultural objects , and announcing that some of these objects are inconvertible , and banning their exportation to other countries.

Spreading awareness of cultural heritage:

People's poor awareness or rather ignorance of the importance of cultural heritage is a key reason for its decay and/ or loss of most of its elements. Thus, we should enhance awareness of the cultural legacy in order to create a close link between citizens and their patrimony so that they can convincingly preserve and safeguard it.

Legacy can never be conserved unless people are educated on its significance, given that the preservation of same contributes to the protection of national identity. This matter can look idealistic; however, people should realize that the conservation of heirloom would ultimately be for the common good of all citizens. Thus, it is incumbent upon every citizen to do his/her utmost to serve the public interests of their country. In other words, the preservation of heritage should not be only the responsibility of government and its competent institutions.

Moreover, laws, however strict, can never supersede morality and conscience in deterring citizens from destroying the elements of cultural heritage. as a matter of fact, the issue of preserving heritage is not confined to public authorities ; rather , it is a collective responsibility that involves the general public. Though the state is officially in charge of conserving national legacy, the moral responsibility of preserving same is placed on the shoulders of citizens.

For citizens to be aware of such a responsibility, long-term awareness campaigns should be launched in such a way as to educate the general public on the importance of their legacy and to impress upon them the need to care for it.

Though cultural legacy is so intimate to people, being an integral part of their life, it has sunk into oblivion due to the accelerating pace of development and the growing impact of cultural invasion that made people even forget about themselves, their past and present. So being, cultural heritage, including antiquities, manuscripts etc., becomes

the subject of speculations in the sense they are commoditized , put up for auction and/or trafficked or smuggled abroad. Therefore, the sabotage of archeological sites and destruction of historic landmarks becomes a key feature of contemporary life, or rather its ugly face. The result is that significant components of national heritage would be, all of a sudden, destroyed or get lost in no time.

Therefore, we should stress the importance of the role of civil society organizations in preserving national heritage in order to preserve and root national identity. It is recommended that these organizations create a database on cultural heritage to be updated on a regular basis so that it can achieve the ultimate purpose of conserving cultural heritage at the local, regional and international levels. Also, these outfits should be provided with the necessary funds to enable them carry out studies and hold conferences, symposiums and exhibitions on the revival and preservation of cultural legacy at the local, regional and international levels.

Consequently, long-terms educational programs should be undertaken to spread awareness of the importance of cultural heritage among people and governments , something that should be prioritized and given a sense of urgency in order to salvage the remaining semblance of cultural heritage whose values are crumbling under the strikes of the axes of artificial modernity.

These include but not restricted to the following:

- Setting up more museums.
- Production and distribution of cultural heritage-related publications.
- Confirming the role of the general public in preserving legacy and employing it for the benefit of the masses.
- Circulating all legislation on cultural heritage.
- Encouraging all countries, including their provinces, cities, and villages, to project their historic milestones.

Citizens' respect for and compliance with heritage conservation laws and their cooperation with the competent authorities, including by reporting any incidents of smuggling and or stealing cultural objects, would enable these to timely take the necessary measures to preserve historical sites and cultural objects.

Prioritization:

Should we want to talk about the practical steps of conserving cultural heritage, we ought to recognize that the process involves many stages, including defining and identifying cultural elements, their concepts, and social functions and then documenting same in order to be able to carry out relevant studies on the components of cultural heritage. The purpose is to conserve and safeguard the cultural heirloom so that it can be, over time, transferred to future generations. However, the transmission of cultural heritage can be achieved through educational coordination on the part of official and unofficial agencies. Such efforts can culminate into the creation of a national registry based on a database containing all information on cultural heritage, which should be provided with dexterous manpower.

The importance of conserving cultural heritage indicates that it is an integral part of any country's national legacy; therefore, genuine efforts should be exerted to spread awareness of the significance of cultural heritage. These include the documentation of cultural heritage in ASSECAA member states, enactment of heritage preservation laws, laying out a national strategy to safeguard it and then undertaking awareness programs on the intangible cultural heritage. In addition, media outlets must be engaged in setting out communication plans, integrating heritage in all government policies and plans in each country, and then engaging people in identifying and debating the phenomena that reflect negatively or positively on the sustainability and vitality of cultural heritage. Further, awareness drives should be consistent with cultural heritage legislations, in addition to the fact that a local, regional and international strategies should be laid out for the purpose of preserving the cultural heritage. It is also necessary to make an inventory of ASSECAA member states' cultural heritage elements as per the UNESCO standards for the safeguarding of legacy.

At this juncture, it is necessary to recognize the significant role ASSECAA has been playing in enacting heritage-related laws and supporting intercultural dialogue which would result in a better understanding of the common values shared by Africa and Arab world and the world at large. This is where parliaments and shura councils in ASSECAA members countries come in to legislate laws, ratify and revitalize international treaties aimed at consolidating local and regional policies related to cultural legacy, and paving the way for respecting, safeguarding same, and questing

for a common ground among cultures in order to circumvent the challenges the two regions.

Undoubtedly, common human values unify all cultures and civilizations in such a manner that calls for celebrating the cherished cultural diversity that forms the collective Afro-Arab heritage.

In my modest opinion, the best means of bringing concerted efforts at the conservation of cultural heritage in Africa and Arab world to fruition is the establishment of an Afro-Arab cultural institute on the part of ASSECAA members, which can be assigned with the task of setting out and coordinating heritage-related policies. Besides, members should sharpen their interest in preserving cultural heritage by means of unifying their efforts setting out joint programs in coordination with other concerned agencies such as universities, think-tanks, etc.

Furthermore, members can encourage forging partnerships and networks to ensure the a dynamic cooperation among local and international specialized bodies, in addition to setting primary criteria for inscribing cultural heritage elements on the UNESCO list based on the previous yardsticks set by the international body.

The proposed institute can contribute more to upgrading the above-mentioned criteria and any other concepts related to cultural legacy. It may play an active part in defining the role of members as well as public and private institutions, let alone scouting for funds from individuals, communities, and local and international agencies.

