



SHEIKH ZAYED BIN SULTAN AL NAHYAN

A Special Tribute



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ON 2 NOVEMBER 2004, HIS HIGHNESS SHEIKH ZAYED BIN SULTAN AL NAHYAN, President of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, died. He was in his late eighties and had been Ruler of Abu Dhabi since 1966, and UAE President since the formation of the Federation on 2 December 1971. He was succeeded as Ruler of Abu Dhabi by his eldest son and Crown Prince, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who, on 3 November, was also elected unanimously by the Supreme Council of Rulers of the UAE as the country's second President.

Sheikh Zayed had been involved in government since 1946, when he became the Representative of the Ruler of Abu Dhabi in the Eastern Region of the emirate, and, upon becoming Ruler in 1966, he took the initiatives that led to the formation of the seven-member UAE Federation five years later. For the citizens of the Emirates, the vast majority of whom were too young to recall any other leader, he was not merely a President and Ruler, but he was also like a father. His passing prompted, as was to be expected, an outpouring of grief throughout the country, both among citizens and amongst the UAE's large expatriate population, many of whom have lived much or all of their lives in the Emirates.

President Sheikh Zayed, however, was not merely a national leader, but a widely-respected Arab and world statesman, as was shown by the fact that many Kings and Heads of State, Crown Princes, Prime Ministers and other senior government figures from around the globe flew in to attend his funeral or to pay their condolences to his successor. Among them were representatives not only from the Arab world, such as the Kings of Bahrain and Jordan, the Sultan of Oman, the Emir of Qatar, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia and the Presidents of Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan and Algeria, but also from Asia, including the Presidents of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and from Europe, including the President of France and Britain's Prince Charles, Africa and the Americas. He also received the rare tribute of a special motion of condolences in Britain's House of Commons.

Obituaries in some of the world's leading newspapers, such as *The New York Times* and *The Times*, as well as the many messages of condolence received by President Sheikh Khalifa, from world figures such as Britain's Queen, the US



and French presidents, the Emperor of Japan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and numerous other monarchs, presidents and prime ministers, paid credit both to his achievements in developing the United Arab Emirates into a stable, modern and tolerant state, through a sagacious use of the country's oil and gas revenues, but also to his wisdom in international affairs, holding fast to his own basic principles, while seeking to promote conciliation and peace-making wherever the opportunity arose.

Thus Britain's Queen Elizabeth expressed her condolences to President Sheikh Khalifa 'on the death of your distinguished father . . . who served your country with such dedication and dignity over many years. I am sure that the prosperity of the UAE today will be widely seen as a testimony to Sheikh Zayed's wisdom, skill and devotion to the service of the state'.

US President George W. Bush commented: 'The United States mourns the passing of a great friend of our country . . . Sheikh Zayed was . . . a pioneer, an elder statesman and a close ally. He and his fellow rulers built their federation into a prosperous, tolerant and well-governed state'.

France's President Jacques Chirac, expressing 'deep sorrow and emotion', described Sheikh Zayed as 'a man of peace and vision'. In a message to Sheikh Khalifa, he added: 'The work accomplished by Sheikh Zayed is huge . . . Man of peace and vision, he kept promoting the virtues of compromise, reason and dialogue in a region troubled by crises and conflicts. His name will remain closely associated with the cause of peace and development in the Middle East to which he devoted his life'.

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted in a statement that Sheikh Zayed had 'devoted tireless efforts to building the state and nation and, in so doing, earned the respect of the population for his wisdom, generosity and his achievements in building a prosperous economy. Sheikh Zayed's wisdom, strong belief in diplomacy and generous assistance to developing countries also won him wide renown outside his own country – in the Islamic world and even further afield. And he was a friend of the United Nations, who always sought to strengthen relations between the Organisation and his country'.

He was honoured in a special commemorative session of the UN General Assembly, a rare mark of appreciation.

Insofar as it was possible to detect a single thread running through the statements and messages, as well as through the response of UAE residents, it was that the life and achievements of President Sheikh Zayed were characterised by his deep religious faith, his vision, his determination and hard work, his generosity, both at home and abroad, and the way in which he devoted his life to the service of his people and to the pursuit, at home and elsewhere, to helping those in need and to the creation of a better world.







The United Arab Emirates today is his memorial – not just the physical infrastructure but, more importantly, its people – while the international response to his passing is testimony to the way in which he gave to his country a voice listened to, with respect, around the world.

In a statement on the election of Sheikh Khalifa as the new President, the members of the UAE Supreme Council noted their ‘keen desire to be loyal to the principles of leadership and the values of justice and right laid down by His Highness Sheikh Zayed’ and pledged to follow his path. In their view, such is the best way of honouring his memory.

Born around 1918 in Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Zayed was the youngest of the four sons of Sheikh Sultan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Ruler of Abu Dhabi from 1922 to 1926. He was named after his grandfather, Sheikh Zayed bin Khalifa, who ruled the emirate from 1855 to 1909, the longest reign in the three and a half centuries since the Al Nahyan family emerged as leaders of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.

Abu Dhabi, like the other emirates of the southern Arabian Gulf formerly known as the Trucial States, was then in treaty relations with Britain. At the time Sheikh Zayed was born, the emirate was poor and undeveloped, with an economy based primarily on fishing and pearl diving along the coast and offshore and on simple agriculture in scattered oases inland. Part of the population was nomadic, ranging across a wide area of south-eastern Arabia in search of pasture.

Life, even for members of the ruling family, was simple. Education was generally confined to lessons in reading and writing, along with instruction in Islam from the local preacher, while modern facilities such as roads, communications and health care were conspicuous only by their absence. Transport was by camel or boat, and the harshness of the arid climate meant that survival itself was often a major concern.

In early 1928, following the death of Sheikh Sultan’s successor, his brother Sheikh Saqr, a family conclave selected as Ruler Sheikh Shakhbut, Sheikh Sultan’s eldest son. He was to hold the post until August 1966, when he stepped down in favour of his brother Zayed.

Throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, as Sheikh Zayed grew to manhood, he displayed an early thirst for knowledge that took him out into the desert with the *bedu* tribesmen to learn all he could about the way of life of the people and the environment in which they lived. He later recalled with pleasure his experience of desert life and his initiation into the sport of falconry, which became a lifelong passion.

In his book, *Falconry: Our Arab Heritage*, published in 1977, Sheikh Zayed noted that the companionship of a hunting party

... permits each and every member of the expedition to speak freely and express his ideas and viewpoints without inhibition and restraint, and allows the one responsible to acquaint himself with the wishes of his people, to know their problems and perceive their views accurately, and thus to be in a position to help and improve their situation.

From his desert journeys, Sheikh Zayed developed an understanding of the relationship between man and his environment and, in particular, the need to ensure that sustainable use was made of natural resources. Once an avid shot, he abandoned the gun for falconry at the age of 25, aware that hunting with a gun could lead rapidly to extinction of the native wildlife.

He learned, too, about the coastal fishing communities, and the age-old offshore pearling industry, which had begun as long ago as 5000BC, and involved diving without artificial aids to the seabed to harvest the pearls that were to be found there in profusion. By the 1930s, as a result of the world economic depression and of the Japanese invention of the cultured pearl, the industry was dying, and, besides gaining an insight into the hardships faced by those involved, he also saw the urgent need for alternative sources of income to be found. His recognition of the dangers of dependence on one single source of income, linked to the vagaries of international markets, was a lesson that he carried forward into later life, when he insisted, with considerable success, that the United Arab Emirates needed to diversify its economy beyond the lucrative exploitation of oil and gas.

His travels in the remoter areas of Abu Dhabi and his voyages offshore provided Sheikh Zayed with a deep understanding both of the country and of its people. In the early 1930s, when the first oil company teams arrived to carry out preliminary surface geological surveys, he was assigned by his brother the task of guiding them around the desert. At the same time, he obtained his first exposure to the industry that was later to have such a great impact upon the country.

In the year 1946, Sheikh Zayed was chosen to fill a vacancy as Ruler's Representative in the Eastern Region of Abu Dhabi, centred on the oasis of Al Ain, approximately 160 kilometres east of the island of Abu Dhabi itself. Inhabited continuously for over 5000 years, the oasis had nine villages, six of which belonged to Abu Dhabi and three, including Buraimi, by which name the oasis was also known, which belonged to the Sultanate of Oman. The job involved not only the task of administering the six villages but also the whole of the adjacent desert region, enabling Sheikh Zayed to learn the techniques of government as well as deepening his knowledge of the tribes. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Saudi Arabia's territorial claims to Buraimi provided him with the opportunity to gain experience of politics on a broader scale.

Sheikh Zayed brought to his new task a firm belief in the values of consultation and consensus, in contrast to confrontation. Foreign visitors, such as the British





explorer Sir Wilfred Thesiger, who first met him at this time, noted with approbation that his judgements ‘were distinguished by their acute insights, wisdom and fairness’.

Sheikh Zayed swiftly established himself not only as someone who had a clear vision of what he wished to achieve for the people of Al Ain, but also as someone who led by example.

A key task in the early years in Al Ain was that of stimulating the local economy, which was largely based on agriculture. To do this, he ensured that the ancient subterranean water channels or falajes (*aflaj*) were cleaned out, and personally financed the construction of a new one, taking part in the strenuous labour that was involved.

He also ordered a revision of local water ownership rights to ensure a more equitable distribution, surrendering the rights of his own family as an example to others. The consequent expansion of the area under cultivation in turn generated more income for the residents of Al Ain, helping to re-establish the oasis as the predominant market centre for a wide area.

With development gradually beginning to get under way, Sheikh Zayed commenced the laying out of a visionary city plan, and, in a foretaste of the massive afforestation programme of today, he also ordered the planting of ornamental trees that, now grown to maturity, have made Al Ain one of the greenest cities in Arabia.

In 1953, Sheikh Zayed made his first visit to Europe, accompanying his brother Shakhbut to Britain and France and attending an international arbitration tribunal on the legality of offshore oil concessions in the emirate. He recalled later how impressed he had been by the schools and hospitals he visited, becoming determined that his own people should have the benefit of similar facilities:

There were a lot of dreams I was dreaming about our land catching up with the modern world, but I was not able to do anything because I did not have the wherewithal in my hands to achieve these dreams. I was sure, however, that one day they would become true.

Despite the lack of government revenues, Sheikh Zayed succeeded in bringing progress to Al Ain, establishing the rudiments of an administrative machinery, personally funding the first modern school in the emirate and coaxing relatives and friends to contribute towards small-scale development programmes.

Oil production was to provide Sheikh Zayed with the means to fund his dreams, with the export of the first cargo of Abu Dhabi crude in 1962. Although oil prices were then far lower than they are today, the rapidly growing volume of exports, from both onshore and offshore, revolutionised the economy of Abu Dhabi and its people began to look forward eagerly to receiving similar benefits



to those already being enjoyed by their neighbours in Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. The pearling industry had finally come to an end shortly after the Second World War, and little had emerged to take its place. Indeed, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, many people had left Abu Dhabi for other, oil-producing, Gulf states where there were opportunities for employment.

The economic hardships experienced by Abu Dhabi since the 1930s had accustomed the Ruler, Sheikh Shakhbut, to a cautious frugality. Despite the growing aspiration of his people for progress, he was reluctant to invest the new oil revenues in development. Attempts by members of his family, including Sheikh Zayed, and by the leaders of the other tribes in the emirate to persuade him to move with the times were unsuccessful, and eventually the Al Nahyan family decided that the time had come for him to step down. The record of Sheikh Zayed over the previous 20 years in Al Ain and his popularity among the people made him the obvious choice as successor.

On 6 August 1966, Sheikh Zayed became Ruler, with a mandate from his family to press ahead as fast as possible with the development of Abu Dhabi. He was a man in a hurry. His years in Al Ain had not only given him valuable experience in government, but had also provided him with the time to develop a vision of how the emirate could progress. With revenues growing year by year as oil production increased, he was determined to use them in the service of the people, and a massive programme of construction of schools, housing, hospitals and roads got rapidly under way.

Of his first few weeks, Sheikh Zayed later said:

All the picture was prepared. It was not a matter of fresh thinking, but of simply putting into effect the thoughts of years and years. First I knew we had to concentrate on Abu Dhabi and public welfare. In short, we had to obey the circumstances: the needs of the people as a whole. Second, I wanted to approach other emirates to work with us. In harmony, in some sort of federation, we could follow the example of other developing countries.

One of Sheikh Zayed's early steps was to increase contributions to the Trucial States Development Fund, established a few years earlier. Abu Dhabi soon became its largest donor. At the beginning of 1968, when the British announced their intention of withdrawing from the Arabian Gulf by the end of 1971, Sheikh Zayed acted rapidly to initiate moves towards establishing closer ties with the emirates.

Along with the late Ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, who was to become Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed took the lead in calling for a federation that would include not only the seven emirates that together made up the Trucial States, but also Qatar and Bahrain. When early hopes of a federation of nine states eventually foundered, Sheikh



Zayed led his fellow rulers in achieving agreement on the establishment of the UAE, which formally emerged on the international stage on 2 December 1971.

While his enthusiasm for federation was a key factor in the formation of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed also won support for the way in which he sought consensus and agreement among his fellow rulers:

I am not imposing change on anyone. That is tyranny. All of us have our opinions, and these opinions can change. Sometimes we put all opinions together, and then extract from them a single point of view. This is our democracy.

Sheikh Zayed was elected by his fellow rulers as the first President of the UAE, a post to which he was successively re-elected at five-year intervals.

The new state came into being at a time of political turmoil in the region. A couple of days earlier, on the night of 30 November and the early morning of 1 December, Iran had seized the islands of Greater and Lesser Tunb, part of Ra's al-Khaimah, and had landed troops on Abu Musa, part of Sharjah (see section on Foreign Policy).

On land, demarcation of the borders between the individual emirates and with the Federation's neighbours had not been completed, although a preliminary agreement had been reached between Abu Dhabi and Oman (a final agreement on the UAE border with Oman was ratified in 2003).

Foreign observers, who lacked an understanding of the importance of a common history and heritage in bringing together the people of the UAE, predicted that the new state would survive only with difficulty, pointing to disputes with its neighbours and to the wide disparity in the size, population and level of development of the seven emirates.

Better informed about the character of the country, Sheikh Zayed was naturally more optimistic. Looking back a quarter of a century later he noted:

Our experiment in federation, in the first instance, arose from a desire to increase the ties that bind us, as well as from the conviction of all that they were part of one family, and that they must gather together under one leadership.

We had never (previously) had an experience in federation, but our proximity to each other and the ties of blood relationship between us are factors which led us to believe that we must establish a federation that should compensate for the disunity and fragmentation that earlier prevailed.

That which has been accomplished has exceeded all our expectations, and that, with the help of God and a sincere will, confirms that there is nothing that cannot be achieved in the service of the people if determination is firm and intentions are sincere.

The predictions of those early pessimists were overwhelmingly shown to be unfounded. In the 33 years that have followed, the UAE has not only survived, but



has developed at a rate that is almost without parallel. The country has been utterly transformed. Its population has risen from around 250,000 in 1971 to an estimate of around 4.3 million by late 2004. Progress, in terms of the provision of social services, health and education, as well as in sectors such as communications and the oil and non-oil economy, has brought a high standard of living that has spread throughout the seven emirates, from the ultra-modern cities to the remotest areas of desert and mountains. The change has, moreover, occurred against a backdrop of enviable political and social stability, despite the insecurity and conflict that has dogged much of the rest of the Gulf region.

The country has also established itself firmly on the international scene, both within the Arab region and in the broader community of nations. Its pursuit of dialogue and consensus and its firm adherence to the tenets of the Charter of the United Nations, in particular those dealing with the principle of non-interference in the affairs of other states, have been coupled with a quiet but extensive involvement in the provision of development assistance and humanitarian aid that, in per capita terms, has few parallels.

There is no doubt that the experiment in federation has been a success and the undoubted key to the achievements of the UAE has been the central role played by Sheikh Zayed during his years of leadership.

During his years in Al Ain he was able to develop a vision of how the country should progress, and, after becoming first Ruler of Abu Dhabi and then President of the UAE, he devoted over three and a half decades to making that vision a reality.

One foundation of his philosophy as a leader and statesman was that the resources of the country should be fully used to the benefit of the people. The UAE is fortunate to have been blessed with massive reserves of oil and gas and it is through careful utilisation of these, including the decision in 1973 that the government of Abu Dhabi, the emirate with the lion's share of reserves, should take a controlling share of the oil reserves. Together with its total ownership of the associated and non-associated gas reserves, agreed with the oil concession holders several years earlier, this ensured that the new state would have the financial resources necessary to underpin the development programme. Indeed there has been sufficient to permit the setting aside of large amounts for investment on behalf of future generations, now largely managed through the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority.

The financial resources, however, were always regarded by Sheikh Zayed not as a means unto themselves, but as a tool to facilitate the development of what he believed to be the real wealth of the country – its people, and, in particular, the younger generation. As he stated:

Wealth is not money. Wealth lies in men. This is where true power lies, the power that we value. They are the shield behind which we seek protection. This is what

has convinced us to direct all our resources to building the individual, and to using the wealth with which God has provided us in the service of the nation, so that it may grow and prosper.

Unless wealth is used in conjunction with knowledge to plan for its use, and unless there are enlightened intellects to direct it, its fate is to diminish and to disappear. The greatest use that can be made of wealth is to invest it in creating generations of educated and trained people.

Addressing the graduation ceremony of the first class of students from the Emirates University in 1982, Sheikh Zayed said:

The building of mankind is difficult and hard. It represents, however, the real wealth [of the country]. This is not found in material wealth. It is made up of men, of children, and of future generations. It is this which constitutes the real treasure.

Within this framework, Sheikh Zayed believed that all of the country's citizens have a role to play in its development. Indeed he defined it not simply as a right, but as a duty. In one address to his colleagues in the Federal Supreme Council, he noted:

The most important of our duties as Rulers is to raise the standard of living of our people. To carry out one's duty is a responsibility given by God, and to follow up on work is the responsibility of everyone, both the old and the young.

Both men and women, he believed, should play their part. Recognising that in the past a lack of education and development had prevented women from playing a full role in much of the activity of society, he took action to ensure that this situation was addressed rapidly. Although women's advocates might argue that there is still much to be done, the achievements have been remarkable, and the country's women are now increasingly playing their part in political and economic life by taking up positions at all levels in the public and private sectors, with the first woman being appointed to the Cabinet late in 2004, the day before he died. In so doing, they enjoyed Sheikh Zayed's full support:

Women have the right to work everywhere. Islam affords to women their rightful status, and encourages them to work in all sectors, as long as they are afforded the appropriate respect. The basic role of women is the upbringing of children, but, over and above that, we must offer opportunities to a woman who chooses to perform other functions. What women have achieved in the Emirates in only a short space of time makes me both happy and content. We sowed our seeds yesterday, and today the fruit has already begun to appear. We praise God for the role that women play in our society. It is clear that this role is beneficial for both present and future generations.



Remarkable progress has now been achieved by the women of the Emirates, due in no small measure to initiatives taken by Sheikh Zayed and by his wife, HH Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, who is the President of the country's General Women's Union. Already playing a prominent role in the civil service, health, education and business, and even in the police and armed forces, the UAE's women are now increasingly active in the political process, through membership in the various consultative and legislative bodies, and, as noted above, in the Cabinet.

In an interview in October 2002, Sheikh Zayed noted that:

The Woman is the mother, sister, aunt and wife of Man, and we should not, therefore, deprive women of their rights, which God has instructed us to respect and observe. Women should be respected and encouraged in whatever work they might do.

'The UAE General Women's Union has contributed actively to the enhancement of the role of and contribution of women,' he noted, 'while at the same time, together with this contribution, UAE women have maintained and preserved the values of our society'.

Sheikh Zayed long, and emphatically, made it clear that he believed that the younger generation, those who have enjoyed the fruits of the UAE's development programme throughout their lives, must take up the burden once carried by their parents. Within his immediate family, he ensured that his sons took up posts in government at which they were expected to work, and not simply enjoy as sinecures. Besides his heir as Abu Dhabi Ruler and successor as UAE President, Sheikh Khalifa, most hold senior positions in the federal or local governments. When in the early 1990s, some young UAE men complained about the perceived lack of employment opportunities at a salary level that met their expectations, he bluntly offered them positions as agricultural labourers, so that they might learn the dignity of work:

Work is of great importance, and of great value in building both individuals and societies. The size of a salary is not a measure of the worth of an individual. What is important is an individual's sense of dignity and self-respect. It is my duty as the leader of the young people of this country to encourage them to work and to exert themselves in order to raise their own standards and to be of service to the country. The individual who is healthy and of a sound mind and body but who does not work commits a crime against himself and against society.

We look forward in the future to seeing our sons and daughters playing a more active role broadening their participation in the process of development and shouldering their share of the responsibilities, especially in the private sector, so as to lay the foundations for the success of this participation and effectiveness. At the



same time, we are greatly concerned to raise the standard and dignity of the work ethic in our society, and to increase the percentage of citizens in the labour force. This can be achieved by following a realistic and well-planned approach that will improve performance and productivity, moving towards the long-term goal of secure and comprehensive development.

In this sphere, as in other areas, Sheikh Zayed was long concerned about the possible adverse impact upon the younger generation of the easy life they enjoy, so far removed from the resilient, resourceful lifestyle of their parents. One key feature of Sheikh Zayed's strategy of government, therefore, was the encouragement of initiatives designed to conserve and cherish features of the traditional culture of the people, in order to familiarise the younger generation with the ways of their ancestors. In his view, it was of crucial importance that the lessons and heritage of the past were remembered. They provide, he believed, an essential foundation upon which real progress can be achieved:

History is a continuous chain of events. The present is only an extension of the past. He who does not know his past cannot make the best of his present and future, for it is from the past that we learn. We gain experience and we take advantage of the lessons and results [of the past]. Then we adopt the best and that which suits our present needs, while avoiding the mistakes made by our fathers and grandfathers. The new generation should have a proper appreciation of the role played by their forefathers. They should adopt their model, and the supreme ideal of patience, fortitude, hard work and dedication to doing their duty.

Once believed to have been little more than a backwater in the history of the Middle East, the UAE is now known to have been a country which has played a vital role in the development of civilisation in the region for thousands of years.

The first archaeological excavations in the UAE took place 46 years ago, in 1959, with the archaeologists benefiting extensively from the interest shown in their work by Sheikh Zayed. Indeed, he himself invited them to visit the Al Ain area to examine remains in and around the oasis that proved to be some of the most important yet found in south-eastern Arabia. In the decades that followed, Sheikh Zayed continued to support archaeological studies throughout the country, eager to ensure that the achievements of the past became known to the people of today.

Appropriately, one of the UAE's most important archaeological sites has been discovered on Abu Dhabi's western island of Sir Bani Yas, which for over 25 years has been a private wildlife reserve created by Sheikh Zayed to ensure the survival of some of Arabia's most endangered species.

If the heritage of the people of the UAE was important to Sheikh Zayed, so too was the conservation of its natural environment and wildlife. He believed



that the strength of character of the Emirati people derives, in part, from the struggle that they were obliged to wage in order to survive in the harsh and arid local environment.

His belief in conservation of the environment owed nothing to modern fashions. Acknowledged by the presentation to him of the prestigious Gold Panda award of the Worldwide Fund for Nature, and by the inauguration, early in 2001, of the Zayed International Prize for the Environment (whose first recipient was former US President and Nobel Peace Prize winner Jimmy Carter), it derived, instead, from his own upbringing, where a sustainable use of resources required man to live in harmony with nature. This led him to ensure that conservation of wildlife and the environment is a key part of government policy. At the same time he has stimulated and personally supervised a massive programme of afforestation that has now seen over 150 million trees planted.

In a speech given on the occasion of the UAE's first Environment Day in February 1998, Sheikh Zayed spelt out his beliefs:

We cherish our environment because it is an integral part of our country, our history and our heritage. On land and in the sea, our forefathers lived and survived in this environment. They were able to do so only because they recognised the need to conserve it, to take from it only what they needed to live, and to preserve it for succeeding generations.

With God's will, we shall continue to work to protect our environment and our wildlife, as did our forefathers before us. It is a duty, and, if we fail, our children, rightly, will reproach us for squandering an essential part of their inheritance, and of our heritage.

Like most conservationists, Sheikh Zayed was concerned wherever possible to remedy the damage done by man to wildlife. His programme on the island of Sir Bani Yas for the captive breeding of endangered native animals such as the Arabian oryx and the Arabian gazelle achieved impressive results, so much so that not only is the survival of both species now assured, but animals are also being carefully reintroduced to the wild.

As in other areas of national life, Sheikh Zayed made it clear that conservation is not simply the task of government. Despite the creation of official institutions like the Federal Environment Agency and Abu Dhabi's Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency, the UAE's President believed firmly that there was also a role for the individual and for non-governmental organisations, both of citizens and expatriates.

He believed that society can only develop and flourish if all of its members acknowledge their responsibilities. This applies not only to concerns such as environmental conservation, but to other areas of national life as well.



Members of the Al Nahyan family have been rulers of Abu Dhabi since at least the beginning of the eighteenth century, longer than any other ruling dynasty in Arabia. In Arabian *bedu* society, however, the legitimacy of a ruler, and of a ruling family, derives essentially from consensus and from consent and the legitimacy of the political system today derives from the support it draws from the people of the UAE. The principle of consultation (*shura*) is an essential part of that system.

At an informal level, that principle has long been practiced through the institution of the *majlis* (council) where a leading member of society holds an ‘open-house’ discussion forum, at which any individual may put forward views for discussion and consideration. While the *majlis* system – the UAE’s form of direct democracy – still continues, it is, naturally, best suited to a relatively small community.

In 1970, recognising that Abu Dhabi was embarking on a process of rapid change and development, Sheikh Zayed established the emirate’s National Consultative Council, bringing together the leaders of each of the main tribes and families which comprised the population. A similar body was created in 1971 for the entire UAE, the Federal National Council, the state’s parliament.

Both institutions represent the formalisation of the traditional process of consultation and discussion, and Sheikh Zayed frequently urged their members to express their views openly, without fear or favour.

At present members of both Councils, as well as lower-level Municipal Councils, continue to be selected by the rulers, in consultation with leading members of the community in each emirate. In the future, Sheikh Zayed predicted, however, a formula for elected representatives would be devised. He noted, though, that, as in so many other fields, it would be necessary to move ahead with care in order to ensure that only such institutions as are appropriate for Emirati society are adopted.

Questioned in 1998 by *The New York Times* on the topic of the possible introduction of an elected parliamentary democracy, Sheikh Zayed replied:

Why should we abandon a system that satisfied our people in order to introduce a system that seems to engender dissent and confrontation? Our system of government is based upon our religion, and is what our people want. Should they seek alternatives, we are ready to listen to them. We have always said that our people should voice their demands openly. We are all in the same boat, and they are both captain and crew.

Our doors here are open for any opinion to be expressed, and this is well known by all our citizens. It is our deep conviction that God the Creator has created people free, and has prescribed that each individual must enjoy freedom of choice. No-one should act as if he owns others. Those in a position of leadership should deal with their subjects with compassion and understanding, because this is the duty enjoined upon them by God Almighty, who enjoins us to treat all living creatures with dignity.



How can there be anything less for man, created as God's vice-gerent on earth? Our system of government does not derive its authority from man, but is enshrined in our religion, and is based on God's book, the Holy Quran. What need have we of what others have conjured up? Its teachings are eternal and complete, while the systems conjured up by man are transitory and incomplete.

Sheikh Zayed imbibed the principles of Islam in his childhood and they remained the foundation of his beliefs and principles throughout his life. Indeed, the ability with which he and the people of the UAE were able to absorb and adjust to the remarkable changes of recent decades can be ascribed largely to the fact that Islam has provided an immutable and steadfast core of their lives. Today, it provides the inspiration for the UAE judicial system and its place as the ultimate source of legislation is enshrined in the country's Constitution.

Islam, like other divinely-revealed religions, has those among its claimed adherents who purport to interpret its message as justifying harsh dogmas and intolerance. In Sheikh Zayed's view, however, such an approach was not merely a perversion of the message but is in direct contradiction of it. Extremism, he believed, has no place in Islam. In contrast, he stressed that:

Islam is a civilising religion that gives mankind dignity. A Muslim is he who does not inflict evil upon others. Islam is the religion of tolerance and forgiveness, and not of war, of dialogue and understanding. It is Islamic social justice which has asked every Muslim to respect the other. To treat every person, no matter what his creed or race, as a special soul is a mark of Islam. It is just that point, embodied in the humanitarian tenets of Islam, that makes us so proud of it.

Within that context, Sheikh Zayed set his face firmly against those who preach intolerance and hatred:

In these times, we see around us violent men who claim to talk on behalf of Islam. Islam is far removed from their talk. If such people really wish for recognition from Muslims and the world, they should themselves first heed the words of God and His Prophet. Regrettably, however, these people have nothing whatsoever that connects them to Islam. They are apostates and criminals. We see them slaughtering children and the innocent. They kill people, spill their blood and destroy their property, and then claim to be Muslims.

'Muslims stand against any person of Muslim faith who will try to commit any terror act against a fellow human being,' he said in his interview with *Al Ahram* in October 2002. 'A terrorist is an enemy of Islam and of humanity, while the true Muslim is friendly to all human beings and a brother to other Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This is because Islam is a religion of mercy and tolerance.' In accordance with that belief, Sheikh Zayed firmly condemned the wave of terror attacks that have taken place around the world in recent years.



In September 2001, following the attacks against the United States, he noted in a message to Heads of Government of the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as well as to the leaders of Russia and China that:

the UAE clearly and unequivocally condemns the criminal acts that took place last week in New York and Washington, resulting in the deaths and injuries of thousands. There should be a direct move and a strong international alliance to eradicate terrorism, and all those who provide assistance to, or harbour it.

He recognised, however, the necessity not only of eradicating terrorism, but of tackling its fundamental causes, and, in particular, what he described as ‘the daily and continuous acts of terrorism being committed by Israeli occupation forces in the occupied Palestinian territories against the unarmed Palestinian people’.

Besides the international campaign against the types of terrorism, there should be, he said, a strong international alliance that worked, in parallel, to exert real and sincere efforts to bring about a just and lasting solution to the Middle East conflict. ‘The Arabs and the Islamic world cannot accept what is happening in the occupied Palestinian territories – the daily killings, deportations and destruction. All of this is politically and morally unacceptable’.

‘We can work closely together at this critical and dangerous time through which we are passing,’ Sheikh Zayed told the foreign leaders in September 2001:

We are confident that we can deal with the situation that we face. But we require, too, that your Governments should work in a parallel and effective way to ensure a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

We request all leaders to work in full frankness on the two tasks in parallel and at the same time, thus working for the achievement of a just and lasting solution to the Middle East conflict, based upon the application of international legitimacy and enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination, to an end of occupation, and to establish their own independent state on their territory with Jerusalem as its capital.

‘There will be no permanent peace,’ Sheikh Zayed had noted, ‘unless this is done. For the eradication of one or more individuals will not end the problems (of terrorism) in a permanent way when hundreds or thousands of others may step forward to replace them.’

In a paper delivered on his behalf to an international conference on terrorism held in Abu Dhabi in January 2003, he added: ‘We cannot accept any link between terrorism and a specific religion or race . . . Terrorism is an international phenomenon that has no religion or race . . . We categorically reject the deliberate attempts to link terrorism with the right of a people to resist occupation’.

Sheikh Zayed was an eager advocate of tolerance, discussion and a better understanding between those of different faiths, and in particular, has been an



ardent advocate of dialogue between Muslims and Christians, recognising that this is essential if mankind is ever to move forward in harmony. His faith was well summed up by a statement explaining the essential basis of his own beliefs: ‘My religion is based neither on hope, nor on fear. I worship my God because I love Him.’

That faith, with its belief in the brotherhood of man and in the duty incumbent upon the strong to provide assistance to those less fortunate than themselves, was fundamental to Sheikh Zayed’s vision of how his country and people should develop. It is, too, a key to the foreign policy of the UAE, which he devised and guided since the establishment of the state until his death.

The UAE itself has been able to progress only because of the way in which its component parts have successfully been able to come together in a relationship of harmony, working together for common goals. That approach has also been applied in the sphere of foreign policy. Within the Arabian Gulf region, and in the broader Arab world, the UAE has sought to enhance cooperation and to resolve disagreement through a calm pursuit of dialogue and consensus. Thus one of the central features of the country’s foreign policy has been the development of closer ties with its neighbours in the Arabian Peninsula. The Arab Gulf Cooperation Council, (AGCC) grouping the UAE, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman, was founded at a summit conference held in Abu Dhabi in May 1981, following an initiative by Sheikh Zayed, and has since become, with strong UAE support, an effective and widely-respected grouping. Intended to facilitate the development of closer ties between its members and to enable them to work together to ensure their security, the AGCC has faced three major external challenges during its short lifetime, first the long and costly conflict in the 1980s between Iraq and Iran, which itself prompted the Council’s formation, followed by the August 1990 invasion by Iraq of one of its members, Kuwait, and then by the US-led invasion of Iraq in early 2003. Following the 1990 invasion of Kuwait, units from the UAE played a significant role in the alliance that liberated the Gulf state in early 1991. Subsequently, while supporting the international condemnation of the policies of the Iraqi regime and the sanctions imposed on Iraq by the United Nations during and after the conflict, the UAE expressed its serious concern about the impact that the sanctions had upon the country’s people. And, as the impending invasion of Iraq loomed in late 2002, President Sheikh Zayed also reaffirmed his belief that ‘War never solves a problem. Listening to the sense of reason is the right way to resolve differences between countries . . . This must be based on the principles of justice and the rule of law.’

In the run-up to the war, Sheikh Zayed tried hard to persuade Iraq’s leadership to go voluntarily into exile, so as to prevent their country suffering from a third catastrophic conflict in just over two decades.



Later, once the war had taken place, he expressed his disappointment:

Our position on rejecting the war was clear and frank, and we had tried with all our efforts to prevent the war . . . Now, as the catastrophe has taken place, . . . we will not fall behind in supporting our Iraqi brethren, and assisting them with any technical expertise they may need . . . and helping them with all that we can afford.

In that process, the UAE has emerged as one of the major international donors to Iraq's reconstruction programme. It has, at the same time, welcomed the restoration of sovereignty to Iraq that took place in mid-2004, and has offered the hand of friendship, and assistance, to the new Iraqi Government.

Another key focus of the UAE's foreign policy in an Arab context has been the provision of support to the Palestinian people in their efforts to regain their legitimate rights to self-determination and to the establishment of their own state. As early as 1968, before the formation of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Zayed extended assistance to Palestinian organisations, and continued to do so, although he always believed that it was for the Palestinians themselves to determine their own policies. Since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza and on parts of the occupied West Bank, the UAE has provided substantial help for the building of a national infrastructure and for the refurbishment of Muslim and Christian sites in the Holy Land. While much of the aid has been bilateral, the UAE has also taken part in multilateral development programmes funded by multilateral agencies and groupings and has long been a major contributor to the United Nations Relief Works Agency, UNRWA. With the outbreak of the second Palestinian *Intifada* (Uprising) in September 2000, the UAE, acting on the instructions of Sheikh Zayed, stepped up its assistance to the Palestine Authority, and has also been a forceful critic not only of the repressive policies of the Israeli Government, but also of the failure of the international community, in particular the United States, to force the Israelis to desist. In Sheikh Zayed's view, a solution to the issue could come about only with an end to Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, coupled with an implementation of the relevant international resolutions, of the agreed road-map to peace and of the agreements signed by both sides, so that a Palestinian state can be established in the West Bank and Gaza.

Substantial amounts of aid have also been given to a number of other countries in the Arab world. In Lebanon, for example, and on Sheikh Zayed's personal initiative, the UAE has funded a major programme of clearing the many hundreds of thousands of land mines left behind by the Israelis when they were forced to withdraw in 2000, so that the Lebanese civilian population may return to their homes and land. Other countries like Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Yemen and Morocco have received substantial loans and other aid for their infrastructural development programmes.



Sheikh Zayed had a deeply held belief in the cherished objective of greater political and economic unity within the Arab world. At the same time, however, he long adopted a realistic approach on the issue, recognising that any unity, to be effective, must grow slowly, and with the support of the people. Arab unity, he believed, is not something that can simply be created through decrees of governments that may be simply temporary political phenomena. That approach has been tried and tested both at the level of the UAE itself, which is the longest-lived experiment in recent times in Arab unity, and at the level of the Arabian Gulf Cooperation Council.

On a broader plane, Sheikh Zayed sought consistently to promote greater understanding and consensus between Arab countries and to reinvigorate the League of Arab States. ‘Relations between the Arab leaders,’ he believed, ‘should be based on openness and frankness’:

They must make it clear to each other that each one of them needs the other, and they should understand that only through mutual support can they survive in times of need. A brother should tell his brother: you support me, and I will support you, when you are in the right. But not when you are in the wrong. If I am in the right, you should support and help me, and help to remove the results of any injustice that has been imposed on me.

‘Wise and mature leaders,’ he felt, ‘should listen to sound advice, and should take the necessary action to correct their mistakes. As for those leaders who are unwise or immature, they can be brought to the right path through advice from their sincere friends’.

Within that context, Sheikh Zayed consistently argued throughout the 1990s for the holding of an Arab summit conference, at which the leaders could honestly and frankly address the disputes between them. Only thus, he believed, could the Arab world as a whole move forward to tackle the challenges that face it, both internally and on the broader international plane:

I believe that an all-inclusive Arab summit must be held, but before attending it, the Arabs must open their hearts to each other and be frank with each other about the rifts between them and their wounds. They should then come to the summit, to make the necessary corrections to their policies, to address the issues, to heal their wounds and to affirm that the destiny of the Arabs is one, both for the weak and the strong. At the same time, they should not concede their rights, or ask for what is not rightfully theirs.

Welcoming the holding of the first of the annual summits, in Jordan in March 2001, Sheikh Zayed noted that:

The spirit of understanding and brotherhood which has prevailed during [the] sessions and discussions has brought me great satisfaction. [The] serious deliberations on



the key issues . . . have proved that sincere intentions and frankness are the way for us to achieve success . . . Dialogue is essential between brothers, and we are happy because the Arabs recognise the correct path to follow towards reconciliation and solidarity, and to surmount the negative elements and mistakes of the past, in order to move away from divisions and rifts.

That positive beginning in 2001, however, came to naught in late 2002 and early 2003, as the majority of the leaders of the Arab world failed, in Sheikh Zayed's view, to address themselves sufficiently to the looming crisis in Iraq that preceded the 2003 invasion, and then to the threats to stability throughout the region that subsequently emerged, not only in Iraq.

The UAE President acknowledged readily that unanimity among the Arab leaders, although desirable, cannot always be achieved. He was, therefore, the only leader openly to advocate a revision of the Charter of the League of Arab States to permit decisions to be taken on the basis of the will of the majority. Such has been the experience of the society from which he came, and such has been one of the foundations of the success of the federal experiment in the United Arab Emirates. It was time, he believed, for a similar approach to be adopted within the broader Arab world. That did not mean in his view, however, that essential rights and principles should be set aside. These included, of course, the principle of the inviolability of the integrity of Arab territories. This principle has been a matter of major concern to the United Arab Emirates since its formation, because of the Iranian occupation in 1971 of the UAE islands of Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunb. President Sheikh Zayed and other senior UAE government officials made repeated calls for the occupation to be brought to an end peacefully, either through direct negotiations, or by referral to the International Court of Justice or to international arbitration.

Sheikh Zayed believed:

Our relations with Iran are based on the best interests of the people of the two countries . . . Apart from the issue of the occupied islands, our relations have not been subjected to any kind of difficulties, and it is against this background that we have repeatedly urged Iran to join us in finding a peaceful solution to this problem through mediation and understanding.

Here, as on other foreign policy issues, Sheikh Zayed consistently adopted a firm but calmly worded approach, eschewing rhetoric that could make the search for a solution to problems more difficult.

In the 1990s, the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia were the cause of considerable concern to the UAE President. The time had come, he recognised, for the UAE itself to play a more pro-active role in international peacekeeping operations. The UAE Armed Forces had already begun to establish a record in such peacekeeping activities, first as part of the joint Arab Deterrent Force that



sought for a few years to bring to an end the civil strife in Lebanon, and then through participation in UNISOM TWO, the United Nations peacekeeping and reconstruction force in Somalia.

In early 1999, Sheikh Zayed was among the first world leaders to express support for the decision by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to launch its aerial campaign to force Serbia to halt its genocidal activities against the people of Kosovo. Recognising that there would be a need for an international peacekeeping force once the NATO campaign ended, Sheikh Zayed ordered that the UAE Armed Forces should be a part of any such force operating under the aegis of the United Nations. From late 1999 to 2001, the UAE contingent serving with the UN's KFOR force was the largest from any of the non-NATO states, and the only one from an Arab or Muslim country.

While ensuring that the UAE should increasingly come to shoulder such international responsibilities, however, Sheikh Zayed also made it clear that the UAE's role is one that is focused on relief and rehabilitation.

In the Balkans, and Iraq and Afghanistan and in other countries, the policy adopted by the United Arab Emirates clearly reflects the desire of Sheikh Zayed to utilise the good fortune of his country to provide assistance to those less fortunate. Through bodies like the Zayed Charitable and Humanitarian Foundation and the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, established by Sheikh Zayed before the foundation of the UAE, as well as through institutions like the Red Crescent Society, the country now plays a major role in the provision of relief and development assistance worldwide.

The UAE itself has been able to progress only because of the way in which its component parts have successfully been able to come together in a relationship of harmony, working together for common goals.

Within the Arabian Gulf region, and in the broader Arab world, the UAE has sought to enhance cooperation and to resolve disagreement through a calm pursuit of dialogue and consensus. However, the pursuit of agreement and consensus did not, in Sheikh Zayed's view, justify the setting aside of essential rights and principles. These include not only support for the basic fundamentals of human and civil rights but also the principle of the inviolability of the territorial integrity of states, whether Arab or others.

Pursuit of these rights and principles has characterised the foreign policy of the state, bringing Sheikh Zayed's own philosophy and humanitarianism to bear far from the boundaries of the state itself. In essence, the philosophy of Sheikh Zayed, derived from his deeply held Muslim faith, was that it is the duty of man to seek to improve the lot of his fellow man.

His record in over half a century of government, from local to international level, is an indication of the dedication and seriousness with which he sought to carry out that belief.



