EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

State Party

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

State, Province or Region

Ad-Dir’iyah Governorate, Riyadh region

Name of Property/Site

At-Turaif District in ad-Dir’iyah

Geographical coordinates to the nearest second

The centre of the Nominated Property (Saad Ibn Saud Palace) is at:
Latitude: 24° 44’ 02,88” N
Longitude: 46° 34’ 20,88” E

The area of the nominated property is of 28,78 hectares.

The limits of the Nominated Property are identified by the following 4 points:
North limit: 24° 44’ 51” N – 46° 33’ 39” E
South limit: 24° 43’ 28” N – 46° 34’ 24” E
East limit: 24° 44’ 00” N – 46° 34’ 53” E
West limit: 24° 44’ 10” N – 46° 33’ 29” E

Textual Description of the boundaries of the Nominated Site

At-Turaif neighbourhood, located on a low plateau of natural limestone between the large Wadi Hanifah on the north and a series of smaller wadis on the south and east somewhat separate and clearly identifiable from the natural landforms and the surrounding communities, is entirely included in the Nominated Property. The boundaries of the Nominated Property are defined precisely on the ground by the metal fence surrounding the nominated site materializing the Antiquities Department-owned parcels. This modern perimeter mostly follows the contour of the ancient at-Turaif City Walls that have been largely restored by the Department of Antiquities during the 1980s, yet it includes a 20-metre large strip outside the city walls to protect their external façade and their immediate vicinity. The Nominated Property is surrounded by a vast Buffer Zone that embraces the central sector of the area originally enclosed by ad-Dir’iyah walls and includes notably the wadi area with its palm date groves and desert areas.

Map of the Nominated Site

See page V.
Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

At-Turaif District in ad-Dir’iyah, extending over some 29 hectares and surrounded by a large buffer zone, possesses Outstanding Universal Values justifying its inscription on the World Heritage List.

Located on a low limestone plateau in the wadi-based oasis of ad-Dir’iyah, at-Turaif became, at the end of the 18th century, a powerful centre under the rule of the House of Saud, who developed it with imposing palaces built in a distinctive and confident style.

Its Outstanding Universal Value relates to its physical vestiges, its location and its relationship in scale with the surrounding developments and landforms.

At-Turaif shows an extraordinary consistency of scale throughout the site and a unique coherence, typical of earthen architectural sites, in its building heights, architectural details, colors and surface textures. The vestiges of the palaces of the Imams of ad-Dir’iyah in at-Turaif — a site where traditional architecture reached unmatched quality — constitute the pre-eminent example of Najdi architectural style, a significant constructive tradition that developed in central Arabia. Their architectural details are significant features of the local architecture and contribute to the world’s cultural diversity.

The site of at-Turaif District in ad-Dir’iyah is an urban and architectural monument presenting the culture and lifestyle of the First Saudi State — direct ancestor of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, it has a noteworthy historic value as the battleground of a significant military event that involved international forces and powers and had a lasting impact on the geopolitics of the whole region.

The city’s multiple layers are entirely preserved including the 20th century housing neighbourhood built with traditional techniques. Its transformation into a Living Heritage Museum aims at preserving not only the material remains, but also, as much as possible, the symbolic and traditional role of the buildings and of the entire village. The reuse project carefully maintains and consolidates the ruins of the main palaces and revitalizes the site re-introducing it as a qualifying experience in the life of modern Saudi citizens. New additions, limited only to the areas where they are essential for the stability, and modifications are done with compatible materials and techniques respectful of the original.

The Nominated Property is entirely owned by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, it is fully protected from external threats and continuously guarded. The Buffer Zone has been drawn with the goal to protect the site from urban encroachments, to preserve the agricultural use of the wadi area, and to protect the views from and towards the site. It includes vast palm dates plantations, traditional neighbourhoods, new developments and preserved desert areas; and it permits to control the evolution of the nearby agricultural and urban settlements.

The site offers a whole range of typologies and preservation conditions, ranging from razed ruins to free standing walls, from original to reconstructed palaces from traditional dwellings to modern mud houses, with an extraordinary unity in the colour, shape and building materials. Its integrity is guaranteed as the whole neighbourhood is included within the Nominated Property, and because its immediate desert and oasis environment has been preserved from the urban development that took place further afar in modern ad-Dir’iyah.
Criteria for Nomination

The nomination of at-Turaif District in ad-Dir’iyah for inscription on the World Heritage List is based upon criteria (iv) and (v) and (vi).

Criterion (iv) requires that at-Turaif District in ad-Dir’iyah should be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;

The site of at-Turaif District in ad-Dir’iyah is an outstanding example of Najdi architectural style. The site of at-Turaif differs from the other Najdi settlement for the size, quality and antiquity of its vestiges. The 18th century palaces of the House of Saud are particularly remarkable for the quality of their mud brick masonry, and the vestiges of the palaces preserve a complete catalogue of the stylistic characteristics of Najd architecture. This unique architectural style that developed in the centre of the Arabian Peninsula is characterized by high ventilation openings, by plastered and limewashed stone columns and column capitals, by high-rise toilet-towers and keel arches, and by the striking masses of its buildings opening on internal courtyards. At-Turaif shows an extraordinary consistency of scale in its asymmetrical urban pattern that developed organically adapting to the natural topography, the circulation and defensive needs, and in response to social relationships. The combination of building materials and constructive systems that can be seen on the site of at-Turaif District in ad-Dir’iyah constitutes an outstanding example of earthen architectural ensemble reflecting the unique development of the traditional know-how of at-Turaif master builders.

Criterion (v) requires that it should be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;

The site of at-Turaif District in ad-Dir’iyah illustrates a significant phase in the human settlement of the central Arabian plateau, when in the mid-18th century ad-Dir’iyah became the capital of an independent Arab State. It is an outstanding example of traditional human settlement developed in a desert environment. Located along one of the major wadis of Arabia, the settlement of ad-Dir’iyah exemplifies the intimate link between landscape, natural resources and the human efforts to settle the land. The rich watertable close to the surface and the fertile lands of the banks of Wadi Hanifah permitted the growth of a large wadi-based oasis settlement that created its political and administrative centre in at-Turaif. The clay to build the houses and palaces was directly obtained from the Wadi Hanifah bed, while the water was drawn from wells dug down to the water table. Some of these wells, representing the evolution of an age-old system, are still visible in the site, living memory of the traditional farming techniques.

Criterion (vi) entails that at-Turaif District in ad-Dir’iyah be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, or with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.

The significance of at-Turaif District in ad-Dir’iyah, is also intimately connected with the teaching of the great reformer Shaikh Mohammed Bin Abdul Wahab who lived, preached and died in the city. From ad-Dir’iyah, following the alliance with Mohammad Bin Saud in 1745, the message of the Reform has reverberated through the Arabian Peninsula and the Muslim world. The Reform produced a formidable state and central authority that unified Arabia and imposed peace and order on its nomads and settled people for the first time since the time of the caliphs. It also brought about reforms that influenced the social practices of the Arabian people, and inspired the thought of many Muslim reformers since the 18th century.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Name and Contact Information of Official Institution

Dr. Ali Saleh Al-Moghannam
Site Manager of at-Turaif District in ad-Dir‘iyah
Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Riyadh, Diplomatic Quarter - 11568
P.O. Box 66680
Tel: +961 4860274
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

AT-TURAIF DISTRICT IN AD-DIR‘IYAH

Geo-referenced satellite image showing the limits of the Nominated Property and of the buffer zone — Satellite colour image provided by ADA, 2005, elaboration SCTA, December 2008.