

FOREIGN SECRETARY IN KSA: ROYAL CALLS, CULTURE AND COFFEE



As you can read about on other pages the Foreign Secretary David Miliband opened the Two Kingdoms Conference on 8 April with HRH Prince Saud. The Two Kingdoms Process works to harness the diverse skills and experiences of Saudis and Britons from outside government, whether working in academia, business or charities to drive forward the bilateral relationship between the Two Kingdoms. It was therefore entirely appropriate that the Foreign Secretary's own programme incorporated both important calls with government Ministers and time learning more about traditional Saudi culture.

Before leaving Riyadh Mr Miliband visited the Dir'a area of southern Riyadh which is home to the historically significant Masmak fort as well as the famous gold souk. The Masmak fort has been synonymous with the Third Saudi State since its first King, HM Abdul Aziz al Saud launched, in 1902, a successful raid on the fort which was the stronghold of his traditional rivals the Al Rasheed. Mr Miliband saw the hole in the door where the young Abdul Aziz hurled his spear to stop a fleeing foe. Mr Miliband was then treated to an extensive tour of the fort which is now filled with accounts and artefacts of that fateful day from which the modern Saudi Arabia grew.

After the tour of the fort Mr Miliband visited the famous gold and jewellery souk, where the local traders design and sell jewellery of the highest standard. Mr Miliband also saw the area of the souk dedicated to carpets from as far afield as Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. After leaving the market Mr Miliband had the chance to sit and chat with Abd al Rahman who had lived in that neighbourhood of Riyadh since his birth in the 1930's. In addition to discussing the changes which Abd al Rahman had witnessed across his life, the Foreign Secretary was interested in the culture and lifestyle of the neighbourhood today. Mr Miliband was also the recipient of some famous Saudi hospitality when Abd al Rahman insisted on buying the Foreign Secretary some Arabic coffee.

Earlier in the day the Foreign Secretary had departed the Two Kingdoms Dialogue at the Conference Guest Palace for extensive talks with HRH Prince Saud al Faisal. In addition to discussing the conference and its central theme, the rejuvenation of the world economy, Prince Saud and Mr Miliband focussed their discussions on the Peace Process as well as Iraq, Pakistan and Sudan. There was also a productive and frank discussion of human rights between the Foreign Ministers. After this the Foreign Secretary was received by HRH Prince Naif bin Abdul Aziz, Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior. The Foreign Secretary congratulated

