



IN HEART OF WAR-TORN YEMEN, CULTURAL HERITAGE REVIVED

World Monuments Fund (WMF) leads campaign to revitalize Old City of Ta'izz

*Overcoming daunting challenges, projects completed
at Qubbat al-Husayniyah and Imam Palace as new initiatives launch,
including plans to support preservation of entire historic center*

March 31, 2021, New York, NY—Once the cultural capital and industrial hub of Yemen, the city of Ta'izz bears the scars of some of the worst fighting of the current civil war. Occupying a strategic location between the major urban centers of Sana'a and Aden, Ta'izz was transformed into one of the longest-running battlegrounds of the Yemeni conflict. Here at the front lines of war, between 2015 and 2017, rebels seeking to wrest control from the government left a path of destruction as they held the city under siege. But in the wake of violence, signs of revitalization emerge.

Since 2018, World Monuments Fund (WMF) has led a wide-ranging initiative to support the recovery of one of Yemen's most iconic cities. Reinvigorating landmarks and reasserting their role in communal life, local heritage professionals trained by WMF have stabilized the Ottoman-era mausoleum Qubbat al-Husayniyah, finished conservation of the Imam Palace in the Ta'izz Museum complex, and will embark on a new project to rehabilitate Hammam al-Mudhaffar, one of the country's oldest public bathhouses. This extraordinary work is only the start of the Old City's continued resurgence. In collaboration with local stakeholders, WMF will also develop conservation guidelines for the historic center that facilitate its long-term protection and support a vision for greater livability.

"Preservation can be a powerful tool to bring together communities after the brutality of war. The buildings that are being restored are symbols of the history, dignity, and resilience of the Yemeni population and we are proud to be working with them on this crucial endeavor," said Bénédicte de Montlaur, President and CEO of WMF.

WMF brought international attention to the condition of Ta'izz's urban heritage and the welfare of its residents with the inclusion of the Old City on the 2018 World Monuments Watch, WMF's biannual program spotlighting 25 sites under threat with the potential for social impact. Since then, WMF has partnered with the General Organization of Antiquities and Museums (GOAM) in Ta'izz to conserve important cultural sites in urgent need of intervention and to develop a blueprint for long-term stewardship.

Qubbat al-Husayniyah

In September 2018, WMF was able to intervene thanks to funding from its Crisis Response Program. Because the conflict prevented WMF staff from traveling to Ta'izz, the project at Qubbat al-

Husayniyah was focused on empowering and building the capacity of WMF's local partner. Working around this challenge, WMF convened training workshops for GOAM staff in Kuwait that equipped them with the necessary skills to implement conservation measures back in Yemen.

Qubbat al-Husayniyah was in a state of rapid deterioration due to dire economic circumstances exacerbated by the conflict. Completed in March 2021, the emergency stabilization project repaired cracks in the mausoleum's dome and addressed encroaching vegetation that placed the entire structure at risk. The building's foundation was reinforced where needed and walls restored according to traditional techniques. Damaged stones in the façade were either remedied or replaced. However, part of this work is temporary in nature and will require regular monitoring as well as a plan for future conservation.

Imam Palace and Al-Badr Palace, Ta'izz Museum Complex

The intervention at Qubbat al-Husayniyah built momentum for more complex projects. In 2019, WMF received support from the British Council Cultural Protection Fund for the physical rehabilitation of the Imam Palace, part of the Ta'izz Museum complex and home to the National Museum. This nineteenth-century Ottoman building sustained significant damage when it was shelled by Houthi rebels in February 2016. Following an earlier phase of façade restoration completed at the end of 2019, the restoration of its interior spaces was finished in February 2021. To further strengthen local expertise in the conservation of the buildings and the management of the museum collection, additional workshops were held in Kuwait and Cairo that built on past training curricula.

In partnership with the International alliance for the protection of heritage in conflict areas (ALIPH), WMF is engaged in another phase to rebuild the adjoining structure, Al-Badr Palace, which will house the country's Heritage Museum. Partially destroyed in the conflict, Al-Badr Palace will be restored according to international conservation standards with compatible traditional materials. With this undertaking, WMF is collaborating with the Musée des Beaux Arts de la Ville de Lyon to develop a museography program to be introduced throughout the entire Ta'izz Museum complex to help reestablish a connection between the people of Yemen and their culture.

Hammam al-Mudhaffar

With additional support from ALIPH, WMF is launching a new project in July 2021 at Hammam al-Mudhaffar, one of Yemen's oldest surviving public bath complexes, to restore the site's original function and support its vital role as a refuge for residents seeking solace and social connection. Once completed, the reopening of the hammam has the potential to inspire regeneration throughout the 'Udayna quarter in the Old City.

Since being recognized on the 2012 Watch, Hammam al-Mudhaffar has only deteriorated further during the years of conflict. Interventions overseen by WMF will address a number of issues at the site, including broken domes, missing glass, roof leakages, lack of waterproofing, debris, and failing water and electrical systems.

Conservation Guidelines for the Old City of Ta'izz

Beyond individual projects, WMF is preparing a set of conservation guidelines for the protection of the entirety of the Old City of Ta'izz. A crucial resource for informing future development that is

sensitive to the city's defining historic features, the guidelines will enable GOAM to proactively safeguard their cultural heritage when the inevitable reconstruction and development of the city takes place. This effort, supported by ALIPH, will put culture at the heart of Ta'izz's long-term recovery through a collaborative process inviting participation from local stakeholders and communities.

WMF Crisis Response

WMF has been committed to protecting and conserving heritage in conflict zones for decades, beginning with its work at Angkor Archaeological Park in Cambodia in 1989 following the Khmer Rouge genocide that decimated the local population, including those with the knowledge and skills to care for heritage sites. Since then, WMF's crisis response work has included the creation of programs in training, site management, and conservation skills at Babylon, Iraq, in the aftermath of the U.S.-led invasion, and stonemasonry conservation training programs in Mafraq, Jordan and Tripoli, Lebanon for Syrian refugees and local Jordanians and Lebanese.

Support for WMF Projects

The physical restoration of the Imam Palace and related conservation skills training was made possible with funding from the British Council Cultural Protection Fund. Additional support from ALIPH is enabling the restoration of Al-Badr Palace, the development of a new museography program at the Ta'izz Museum complex, restoration and rehabilitation of Hammam al-Mudhaffar, and the development of conservation guidelines for the Old City of Ta'izz.

“The protection of the exceptional cultural heritage of Yemen is a key priority for ALIPH. We can intervene in this country thanks to partnerships like the one we have with WMF, which has a great experience in cultural heritage rehabilitation and works hand in hand with local actors.” said Valéry Freland, Executive Director of ALIPH.

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About World Monuments Fund

World Monuments Fund is the leading independent organization devoted to safeguarding the world's significant cultural places to enrich lives and build mutual understanding. For more than 55 years, working at more than 700 sites in 112 countries, its highly skilled experts have applied proven and effective techniques to the preservation of important architectural and cultural heritage sites around the globe. Through the World Monuments Watch—a biennial, nomination-based program—WMF uses cultural heritage conservation to empower communities and improve human well-being. In partnership with local communities, funders, and governments, WMF seeks to inspire an enduring commitment to stewardship for future generations. Headquartered in New York City, the organization has offices and affiliates worldwide. wmf.org

About ALIPH

Founded in March 2017 in response to the massive destruction of cultural heritage in recent years, ALIPH provides support for the protection and rehabilitation of tangible or intangible heritage in conflict or post-conflict areas. Based in Geneva, ALIPH is a public-private partnership and a Swiss foundation with the status of an international organization. To date, it has committed more than 35 million USD to over 100 projects in 22 countries across 4 continents. In Yemen, ALIPH has supported

10 projects since 2018 with an overall commitment of 3 million USD for initiatives in this country alone, of which over 1 million USD for projects implemented by the World Monument Fund in Ta'izz and Soqatra. aliph-foundation.org

About the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund

The British Council is the UK Government's principal agency for building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language. The Council's Cultural Protection Fund supports cultural heritage at risk in twelve countries across the Middle East and North Africa. Created in 2015, the fund aims to help to create sustainable opportunities for economic and social development through building capacity to foster, safeguard and promote cultural heritage. World Monuments Fund and our partners have been the successful recipients of support from the fund for work in Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, as well as in Yemen.

Media Contact

Chelsea Beroza, Press & Media Relations Officer, World Monuments Fund, cberoza@wmf.org