AKTC receives two awards, for Sustainable Development and Excellence, from UNESCO

Delhi, India, 18 December 2020 – The Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) has won two important awards from UNESCO’s Asia-Pacific regional office – for cultural heritage conservation and sustainable development – in Delhi’s Sunder Nursery. The prizes include:

- The 2020 Award for Special Recognition for Sustainable Development
- The 2020 Award for Excellence

The awards were established in 2000 to recognise “the efforts of private individuals and organisations that have successfully restored, conserved and transformed structures and buildings of heritage value in the region”.

UNESCO’s Director in Bangkok, Mr Shigeru Aoyagi, remarked: “As you know, culture, nature and heritage are embedded across many of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. As the United Nation’s only agency with a mandate for heritage, UNESCO advocates using heritage as a driver for sustainable development.”

Luis Monreal, AKTC’s General Manager, welcomed the prize. “What these two prizes signify is that good stewardship of the environment means we can simultaneously attend to the world’s heritage and take care of ecological concerns,” he said. “Our work in 10 different parks around the world, and our conservation of monuments around these parks, suggests that we must, as a matter of urgency, combine these two endeavours.”

Ratish Nanda, AKTC’s CEO in India, said that the awards “underscore precisely what we wanted to do, which was to not just preserve historical buildings, but also to restore the natural environment, which had suffered over many years. Promoting ecological development and sustainability whilst providing an educational format for its visitors was a key goal of the Sunder Nursery project”.

The UNESCO Master Jury awarded Special Recognition for Sustainable Development on Sunder Nursery for its “transformative impact in turning a barren site into an urban oasis in the heart of New Delhi”. According to the UNESCO press release, the project “pays equal attention to ecological restoration, thus underscoring the message that heritage conservation is beyond monuments and is only truly sustainable when essential linkages between nature and culture are profoundly understood and nurtured”. UNESCO introduced the new Special Recognition category in 2020 to acknowledge how cultural heritage can be leveraged to achieve sustainable development.
The 2020 Award for Excellence, the highest level of achievement in the Awards’ conservation category, was also given to Sunder Nursery for its “comprehensive renewal of the Sunder Nursery ensemble [that] sets a new bar for heritage restoration and serves as a catalytic model for public-private partnerships in India”. It also mentioned that “world-class conservation combining the latest technology with rich building craft traditions reinstated severely dilapidated Mughal tombs, decorative works, and garden features, such as lotus ponds, following an extensive process of study and documentation… The vitality of Sunder Nursery, which is partly included in the World Heritage Site of Humayun’s Tomb, is a testament to the project team’s multi-faceted approach to heritage conservation and establishes a paradigm for connecting physical fabric to ecology and societal well-being”.

Over the last 20 years, AKTC’s conservation work has won a number of awards, including 15 from UNESCO’s Asia-Pacific office.

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Since 2000, the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation programme have been recognising the efforts of private individuals and organisations that have successfully restored, conserved and transformed structures and buildings of heritage value in the region. By acknowledging private efforts to restore and adapt historic properties, the Awards encourage other property owners to undertake conservation projects within their communities, either independently or by seeking public-private partnerships. For more information about the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation, please see: https://bangkok.unesco.org/theme/asia-pacific-heritage-awards

For over 30 years, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) has shown how culture can be an asset and that it can be a catalyst for improvements in the quality of life – even in the poorest and remote areas of the globe. It works to preserve and revitalise cultural assets; reinvigorates cultural traditions; creates education programmes that foster mutual understanding; and identifies architectural excellence that positively impacts the way people live, work and interact. The Trust’s programmes include the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme, the Aga Khan Music Programme, the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, Canada, the on-line resource Archnet.org, and related programmes. For more information about the Aga Khan Historic Cities Programme, please see: https://www.akdn.org/our-agencies/aga-khan-trust-culture/aga-khan-historic-cities-programme/historic-cities-overview. For more information on the projects in Delhi, India, please see the Nizamuddin Renewal site: https://www.nizamuddinrenewal.org/