

Press Release

## Ajyal Talks unlock the marvel of Qatari architecture and Doha's 'Skyline of Stories' for youth jurors

- *Engineer Abdullatif Mohamed Al Jasmi, Ibrahim M. Jaidah and Hisham Qaddumi shared insights on the urban planning policies of Doha and its focus on heritage conservation*

**Doha, Qatar; October 5, 2022:** It started with a few scattered homes by the seaside in the 1940. Today, Doha has one of the world's most inspiring skylines. This amazing transformation was the result of deliberate urban planning, with a focus on celebrating the vernacular architecture with contemporary inspirations.

This inspiring story was the theme of the Ajyal Talks titled 'A Skyline of Stories,' attended by Ajyal Jurors at the Special Edition of the 10<sup>th</sup> Ajyal Film Festival. The thought-provoking panel about Doha's iconic cityscape and the future of urban environments offered more than design and architectural insights. It also served as an inspiration for the youth to approach whatever they do – be it films or arts or creative pursuits – with a clear purpose that will build a legacy.

Addressing the audience, Engineer Abdullatif Mohamed Al Jasmi, Director of Cultural Heritage Protection Department at Qatar Museums, manager of the Qatar Cultural Heritage Law Project and Director of the Qatar-Sudanese Archaeological Project, said that cultural experiences are a by-product that one assimilates subconsciously. "When you travel, sit in a theatre, or walk about, you are taking in cultural experiences. That is why it is important to think about the legacy one leaves behind. If you can touch one street, one building, one monument, any one aspect of everyday life, you will leave behind an experience that would live on for generations."

A treasure trove of stories about Doha's architectural history was shared by Hisham Qaddumi, founder and president of the multi-disciplinary planning and design firm, The Arab Architects. The planning and technical advisor to the ruler of Qatar from 1974 to 1987, he drew on his experience of leading the planning, design and construction management of several prestigious developments, including the Doha Master Plan and iconic landmarks such as the Sheraton Hotel, the National Theatre, the Doha Corniche, the University of Qatar, Hamad General Hospital, and the Diwan Amiri, among others.

Qaddumi said scientific urban planning of the city started in the 1970s, with a clear vision to "build a contemporary city rooted in traditional values. We followed several international criteria, which were used in planning at all levels, including quality, expandability, and scale. Our approach in urban planning was to utilise the concepts and vocabulary of Qatari and Islamic architecture in an innovative and creative way."

Ibrahim M. Jaidah, Group CEO and Chief Architect of the Arab Engineering Bureau, overseeing more than 1,600 projects, underlined the need to define a new purpose for heritage restoration projects. "You can restore buildings not to keep them as they are but to create a function that adds value. Every building had a story at some point of time. But soon, that story becomes a memory, which would eventually fade, as would the value of the building. We must look at the narrative of what made the building or place special and apply it to a new purpose. This reactivation will provide a new chapter in the story of the building and guarantee its place in the future."

While underpinning the need to respect tradition, the experts urged audiences not to be constrained by them. They said the Qatari architectural heritage and culture is so rich, and it must be used as a source of inspiration rather than be stuck by the book. They also said the lessons from traditional architecture must be documented as there is a reason that may still be relevant as to why some practices were followed – such as having houses close by (for shade) and erecting windows in a particular direction (to reduce direct sunlight).

The session was moderated by Jumanah Abbas, an architect, writer, and curator, who works on several collaborative projects with institutes and universities.

The Special Edition of the 10<sup>th</sup> Ajyal Film Festival will screen a specially curated programme of important stories from around the world to over 613 jurors from 50 countries. They will also take part in the Ajyal Talks and Spotlight sessions in addition to taking part in lively discussions on cinema and critiquing the movies they watched.

Katara is the Cultural Partner of the Special 10<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Ajyal Film Festival. Contributing Partners include Darwish Holding, the Official Electronics Provider; with FNAC, Sony and 51 East; Qommunication is the Social Media Partner; and Friends of the Festival include Alkalive, the Official Water Sponsor; Giffoni, Qatar Museums, Leisure (Virtuocity).

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