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## At 101, Brazil's Niemeyer Wins Algiers' Library Architectural Project

Contributed by Isaura Daniel  
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Oscar Niemeyer, the renowned Brazilian architect, designed the Aspa (South American-Arab Countries) Library, to be built in Algiers, Algeria. The architectural project was presented this May 21 at the meeting of ministers of Culture of the Arab and South American countries, which took place at the National Museum of Fine Arts of Rio de Janeiro.

At the age of 101, the celebrated and sometimes vilified Niemeyer is still very active.

The government of Algeria selected the Brazilian project after a tender, according to the minister of Culture of Algeria, Khalida Toumi, who was at the meeting in Rio.

Khalida stated that the library should start being built in December, soon after the end of the studies for the project. The conclusion of the construction, according to her, is scheduled to take around two years after works begin. The Algerian minister said that the most difficult part, which was deciding on the initiative, is already in the past. It has already been over two years since the idea was released, in 2006. The government of Algeria, according to Khalida, should cover the cost for construction of the library.

Khalida recalled that Niemeyer has a history connected to Algeria, as has designed a series of constructions there. He was responsible, for example, for the design of Constantine University. A representative of Niemeyer's office presented a drawing of the library to the ministers in Rio. It should have two main buildings, should be in a high area, with a view to the sea, and should include an auditorium, exhibition room, restaurant, square and apartments for researchers.

Also in progress is the development of a project for a South American research institute, to be in Tangiers, Morocco. According to the minister of Communications of Morocco, Khalid Naciri, who was in Rio, the space has not yet started being built, but there is already a 20,000 square meter plot made available by the government of Morocco for that purpose.

The site should serve for the promotion of translations and exchange of research between the countries in South America and the Arab world. The initiative was included in the final document of the meeting.

The final declaration also included the availability of the countries to help in the recovery of cultural assets of Iraq, partly lost due to the war faced by the country. The plea was made by the Iraqi ministers of Culture, Maher Ali Ibrahim, during the meeting of ministers. At the recommendation of the minister of Culture of Brazil, Juca Ferreira, the final declaration got an item calling for support to Iraq in the recovery of its assets.

According to Ibrahim, the museums, auditoriums and theatres of Iraq were destroyed after the North American invasion. With this, historic and artistic collections from Iraq, like archaeological articles, pictures and books, were stolen and traded all over the world.

To his colleagues present at the meeting, the minister said that there is now just one theatre in the country, in Baghdad, which is being recovered. The undersecretary of Cultural Policy at the Ministry of Foreign Relations of Peru, Liliana Cino de Silva, told the story of two articles from Iraq that were confiscated at the airport in Lima and returned to the Arab country.

Apart from the support to Iraq, yesterday's meeting resulted in the resolution and presentation of a series of measures that are being or will be taken for the generation of closer ties between Arabs and South Americans. After the meeting of ministers, the final document also got another paragraph calling for the fostering of Arabic teaching in the South American countries and the teaching of Spanish and Portuguese in the Arab world; another expressed the concern of the countries with regard to preservation of the cultural, historic and religious assets of Jerusalem, calling the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to care for them.

The final document of the meeting also included several other items, like the support to international events in each of the countries, the statement of the importance of the Bibliaspa, a digital library with literature and audiovisual material, special attention to the National Day of Arab Immigration, in Brazil, on March 25th and the call for countries to avoid the trafficking of antiques. It was agreed that the countries will send suggestions and information for the completion of a final plan in the cultural area up to July 22nd, and that the next meeting of ministers should take place in Jordan, in 2011.

The ministers, in their declarations at the conference, pointed out the importance of cultural relations between South America and the Arab countries and the desire for them to grow. "Brazil and Latin America are commanding a new world with regard to dialogue between cultures," said the minister of Culture of Jordan, Sabri Rbeihat. "The meeting between Arabs and South Americans strengthens the confidence in human values and in culture," said the minister of Culture of Sudan, Amin Hassam Amr.

In the sidelines of the event, the ministers of Algeria and Brazil signed a framework agreement in the cultural area. According to minister Juca Ferreira, it is an agreement that shows the desires of both sides for this cooperation to be permanent. From it, should arise joint cultural projects.

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