

# Declaration of the Global Connections Seminar XIX Muscat, Oman

April 2018

*Ahlan wa Sahlan.* 'We, in Oman, welcome you as our family, sharing our peace and hospitality.'

With these words - the conference theme - the delegates to the 19th seminar of Global Connections were welcomed at the opening ceremony in the beautiful hall of Indian School Al Ghubra.

Our hosts - the owners, principal, staff and students of Indian School Al Ghubra - have welcomed us, 30 'Global Connectors' from 19 countries, to a week-long experience of sharing, looking, listening and connecting. We have gathered in Oman's capital city, Muscat.

For most of us this is our first visit to Oman, and our first experience of this Islamic Sultanate and its large expatriate Indian community. We have experienced *Ahlan wa Sahlan*. The tone of national Welcome is set by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said, described by our hosts and conference speakers as the 'father' of the Omani 'family'.

We spent time at four schools, public and private: Omani, Indian and International. We appreciated listening to speakers who play leading roles in Omani education, have walked on foot across the desert expanse of the Empty Quarter, led new campaigns of cancer activism, and pondered the impact of artificial intelligence. We visited the Grand Mosque, were entertained by a percussion ensemble in the Royal Opera House, camped overnight in the Sharquiyah Sands desert, and enjoyed delicious Indian, Omani and Arab cuisine.

Importantly, we consider ourselves travellers, not tourists. There is a crucial difference. Our hosts at Indian School Al Ghubra, a prestigious community school founded in 1990, provide us with context and links to local knowledge. This emphasis is integral to the character of the annual Global Connections conference. We are on a journey of learning and connecting. We lead schools which integrate internationalist perspectives into our educational mission. We believe in the value of international understanding, the rich benefits of cultural diversity and the importance of peace education.

The conferences of Global Connections are always 'on the move' - curious, reflective and experiential. As we travel together in the country which hosts the conference, we talk and share. Journeys connect travellers in special ways through existential moments that become memories. Community is created and re-created. We exchange ideas and the experiences of school leadership, with the diversity of the delegates providing a rich array of insights and perspectives. We inspire one another through talking about best practice. We develop personal and professional relationships, an intercontinental network of individuals working in different contexts.

Our travelling encounters with Omani education, culture and society have been brief but profound. Omani society emphasises *Ahlan wa Sahlan*. In response to this emphasis, and the welcome we have experienced, we hold up a mirror to ourselves. How welcoming are the schools we lead? How clearly articulated is each school's identity as we live out the culture of welcome? How well do our students, staff, parents and alumni feel that they belong? How open are we to receiving visitors as

individuals and groups, with the new ideas and experiences that they bring? How do the societies in which our schools exist view our 'hospitality' and openness or lack of it? In the organisation of Global Connections itself, how well do the practices of welcome permeate?

Oman is on a journey as a peace-making and modernising Islamic nation with a long and fascinating history. A progressive Sultan leads the way. Each of us, as Global Connections delegates, is on a personal journey. So, too, are our schools: their futures are defined by our leadership in the present and the destinations we define. We were poignantly reminded in a conference session that each school's most precious resource consists of the 'dreams, thoughts and emotions' of the students in our care. Each young person is on a personal journey of growth. Our responsibility as school leaders is to nurture these unique paths of individual development.

Having experienced Omani *Ahlan wa Sahlan*, we ponder on these things as educators from across the world - the nature of welcome, traveller's insights shared, and the future journeys of our schools as we embrace our multicultural and international world.