

## **Opening Ceremony of Gandhara Art Exhibition (15 March 2023)**

**Honourable Minister Hu Heping,**

**Ms. Fareena Mazhar, Secretary of National Heritage & Culture Division,**

**Mr. Wang Xudong, Director of Palace Museum,**

**Ambassador Nong Rong, Assistant Foreign Minister,**

**Ambassador Sha Zukang,**

**Mr. Yang Xun,**

**Excellencies, Honourable Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**A very good afternoon and Dajia Hao,**

At the onset, let me welcome you all to the Opening Ceremony of Gandhara Art Exhibition at the prestigious venue of Palace Museum in Beijing. For me and my team at the Embassy, it is an important day which brings to culmination the hard work and persistent efforts of the last three years to bring the ancient Gandhara heritage to China.

I thank Minister Hu Heping for gracing this ceremony as the Chief Guest. His presence here reflects the importance our two countries attach to cultural and people to people exchanges that have laid a strong foundation of our historic relationship. I am also grateful to him and his team for their strong support for the exhibition.

I would also like to express my appreciation for Director Wang Xudong and his able team at the Palace Museum for their key role and support from the very beginning. Their patience and meticulous planning has borne fruits in successfully organizing this 3-month long exhibition.

I would also like to thank Ms. Fareena Mazhar, Secretary of National Heritage & Culture Division, her team and the participating museums of Pakistan for their hard work and valuable support for this important exhibition.

I would be amiss if I don't acknowledge the generous help of Mr. Yang Xun the General Manager of Glorious Holdings Limited for the sponsorship of the event.

I also acknowledge the presence of Ambassador Nong Rong, Assistant Foreign Minister and former Ambassador to Pakistan who all along was an ardent supporter of this event and cultural exchanges between the two countries.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Pakistan is blessed with a rich history, natural beauty and diverse cultural heritage. It is birthplace of many religions and is a cross-roads of civilizations.

The land of Pakistan has been the seat of Gandhara for many centuries. Buddhism flourished from the city of Taxila and valleys of Peshawar and Swat. The Buddhist values of perseverance, patience and peaceful co-existence, including its unique artistic manifestations were transferred to the neighbouring regions, including China through the ancient Silk Road.

Gandhara civilization, that we are celebrating today, can thus be credited with the establishment of early linkages between China and Pakistan. Many Chinese monks including Fa Xian and Xuan Zang during their explorations across into Pakistan the Silk Road carried back with them not only the wisdom and spirituality of Gandhara civilization but also the warm sentiments of love and friendship that forms the foundation of our present fraternal ties.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This exhibition today is meaningful and symbolic in a number of ways.

One, it is an opportunity to reminisce and celebrate our shared heritage. Learning from a Chinese idiom which looks at history as a mirror for planning the future, this event is helping us to do exactly the same. Today we are proud of our relationship which has been nurtured by successive generations of our people and evolved into a unique, one-of-its kind and unparalleled bond in inter-state relations.

Two, it is an ode to the determination and conscious efforts of our two countries to promote and strengthen our deep-rooted people-to-people ties.

Three, this exhibition is also one way of introducing to the Chinese audience, the enormous potential that Pakistan holds for its heritage tourism. As we celebrate 2023 as the Year of China-Pakistan Tourism Exchanges, we invite our Chinese friends to visit Pakistan and see the splendour of our diverse landscapes and cultural traditions, especially Gandhara sites, some of which are also listed among the UNSECO World Heritage List.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like to end with a famous Chinese proverb: “the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” This exhibition is one such step – to give our shared Gandhara heritage the due importance it deserves in our joint public diplomacy efforts to celebrate our historic linkages, educating our people about our shared past, promotion of tourism, and most importantly draw inspiration from our glorious past to build an equally promising future.

I thank you all and my best wishes for the success of this exhibition.

Long live China-Pakistan friendship.

Ba Zhong You Yi Wan Sui.