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It gives me great pleasure to introduce this Exclusive Publication on Holy Makkah. I am especially grateful to HRH Prince Khalid bin Faisal Al Saud, Governor of Makkah and HE Dr Osama Bin Fadl Al Bar, the Mayor of Makkah for all their help and guidance in the preparation of this publication and for their very important and personal messages. I am also grateful to HE Sheikh Abdul Rahman Al-Sudais for contributing an article of such insight.

FIRST is very proud to have produced this book on Makkah, which brings together some of the most important scholars, writers and leaders of the Islamic world. Each provides a unique perspective on the role of Islam and underlines the focal position of the Holy City of Makkah. I wish to thank our editor Waqās Ahmed, who was inspired to compile this important publication following his recent pilgrimage to Makkah.

The Holy City of Makkah is an extraordinary place – located at an elevation of over 900 feet above sea level, situated between two mountain ranges and covering an area of over 460 square miles. The pilgrimage to Makkah attracts millions of Muslims from all over the world – including both the Hajj and Umrah, making it a city of enormous religious importance. This comprehensive collection of essays provides a special insight into the history, culture and religious significance of a city often described as a ‘spiritual oasis’.

As part of the Kingdom’s Vision 2030, the further development of Makkah is a key priority for King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and the government and people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. These efforts have been guided by HRH Prince Khalid bin Faisal Al Saud – the Governor of Makkah and Advisor to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. Makkah is governed by the municipality of Makkah – a municipal council of fourteen locally elected members, headed by the Mayor, HE Dr Osama bin Fadl Al Bar.

The central building of Makkah is the Kaaba, the House of God, believed to have been built by Abraham (Ibrahim) and his son Ishmael. The Kaaba is built of granite and rests on a marble base – it is Islam’s holiest site and the direction for Muslim prayer. Makkah has undergone significant expansion and includes the Makkah Royal Clock Tower, which is the fourth tallest building in the world. With some 15 million Muslims visiting Makkah every year – it has become one of the most cosmopolitan cities of the Muslim world.

We at FIRST are delighted to have produced this special publication on the Holy City of Makkah and hope that it contributes, in a small way, to promoting and fostering a greater and wider understanding of the Islamic World. **F**