

His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan,

Founder of the United Arab Emirates

His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan served as President of the United Arab Emirates since the formation of the Federation on 2 December 1971 and as Ruler of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi since 1966.

Understanding the UAE is impossible without understanding the life of Sheikh Zayed and his deep religious faith, vision, determination and hard work; his generosity at home and abroad; and the way in which he devoted his life to the service of his people and the creation of a better world.

Born 1918 in Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Zayed was the youngest of the four sons of His Highness Sheikh Sultan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Ruler of Abu Dhabi from 1922 to 1926. At the time of Sheikh Zayed's birth, the Emirate was poor and undeveloped, with an economy based primarily on fishing and pearl diving and on simple agriculture in scattered oases inland. As Sheikh Zayed grew into a young man, he travelled extensively throughout the country, gaining a deep understanding of the land and its people. In the early 1930s, when oil company teams arrived to undertake preliminary geological surveys, he obtained his first exposure to the industry that would shape the development of the UAE today.

Through the late 1920s and 1930s, Sheikh Zayed's thirst for knowledge took him into the desert, living alongside Bedouin tribesmen to learn all he could about their way of life and connection with their surroundings. He joyfully recalled his experiences of life and his initiation into the sport of falconry, which became a lifelong passion.

The first cargo of crude oil was exported from Abu Dhabi in 1962. On 6 August 1966, Sheikh Zayed succeeded his elder brother as Ruler of Abu Dhabi.

In 1946, Sheikh Zayed was chosen as Ruler's Representative in Abu Dhabi's Eastern Region, centered on Al Ain, 160 kilometers inland east of Abu Dhabi. The job involved ruling over six villages and an adjacent desert region. Despite a lack of significant government revenue, Sheikh Zayed was successful in advancing Al Ain. Sheikh Zayed established a basic administration system, personally funded the first modern school in the Emirate and encouraged relatives and friends to contribute towards small-scale development.

He revised local water ownership rights to ensure a more equitable distribution, which led to agricultural development and re-establishment of the oasis as the predominant market center. Sheikh Zayed's city planning in Al Ain helped ensure a bright future, and today, the city is one of the greenest in the Arab world.

In August 1966, Sheikh Zayed became Ruler of Abu Dhabi, with a mandate to develop the Emirate as quickly as possible. His years in Al Ain had given him

valuable experience in government and time to develop a vision of progress. With the export of the first cargo of Abu Dhabi crude oil in 1962, Sheikh Zayed could rely on oil revenues to start an infrastructure overhaul, constructing schools, housing, hospitals and roads.

In 1968 with the British announcement of the country's withdrawal from the Arabian Gulf, Sheikh Zayed stepped to action to quickly establish closer ties with the Emirates. Together with the late Ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Sheikh Zayed called for a Federation that would include not only the seven Emirates that made up the Trucial States, but also Qatar and Bahrain.

Seven states followed Sheikh Zayed in establishing the UAE, which formally emerged on the international stage on 2 December 1971.

The new state emerged at a time of political turmoil in the region. A couple of days prior, Iran had seized the islands of Greater and Lesser Tunb, part of Ras al-Khaimah, and had landed troops on Abu Musa, part of Sharjah. Foreign observers predicted that the UAE would survive only with difficulty, pointing to disputes with its neighbours and to the wide disparity between the seven Emirates. Sheikh Zayed was more optimistic and the predictions of those early pessimists were shown to be unfounded.

While Sheikh Zayed's enthusiasm for the Federation was a key factor in the formation of the UAE, he also won support for the way in which he sought consensus and agreement among his fellow rulers. Sheikh Zayed was elected by these rulers to serve as the first President of the UAE, a post to which he was successively re-elected at five-year intervals.

One foundation of his philosophy as a leader and statesman was that the resources of the country should be fully used to the benefit of the people. This extended to the women of the UAE, who flourished under his visions of education, employment and equality for all Emiratis.

In governing the nation, Sheikh Zayed drew from Arabian Bedouin traditions of consensus and consultation.

In 1970, recognizing that Abu Dhabi was embarking on a process of rapid development, Sheikh Zayed formalized the consultation process and established the National Consultative Council, bringing together the leaders of each of the main tribes. A similar body was created in 1971 for the entire UAE: The Federal National Council, the state's parliament.

Sheikh Zayed was also notably a firm opponent of harsh dogmas and intolerance. In an interview in 2002, he said, "Muslims stand against any person of Muslim faith who will try to commit any terror act against a fellow human being. A terrorist is an enemy of Islam and of humanity, while the true Muslim is friendly to all human beings and a brother to other Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This is because Islam is a religion of mercy and tolerance."

In the 1990s Sheikh Zayed recognized that the UAE could play a more active role in international peacekeeping operations. The UAE Armed Forces participated in the Arab Deterrent Force that sought to bring to an end the civil strife in Lebanon, and in UNISOM TWO, the United Nations peacekeeping and reconstruction force in Somalia.

In early 1999, Sheikh Zayed was among the first world leaders to express support for the decision by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to launch its aerial campaign to force Serbia to halt its genocidal activities against the people of Kosovo. From late 1999 to 2001, the UAE contingent serving with the UN's peacekeeping Kosovo Force (KFOR) was the largest from any of the non-NATO states, and the only one from an Arab or Muslim country.

In the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries, the policy adopted by the UAE clearly reflects the desire of Sheikh Zayed to share the good fortune of his country with those less fortunate. The country now plays a major role in the provision of relief and development assistance worldwide, through bodies like the Zayed Charitable and Humanitarian Foundation and the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development—established by Sheikh Zayed before the foundation of the UAE—as well as through institutions like the Red Crescent Society.

His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan died in 2004, in his late eighties, leaving behind a legacy as the Father of the nation. He was succeeded as the UAE's President and as Ruler of Abu Dhabi by his eldest son, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan in 2004.