Your Excellency

As members of the community of international and Jordanian archaeologists, we call for the immediate halt of planned mining in Jordan’s Dana Biosphere Reserve. The mining would irrevocably destroy this natural jewel and its unique cultural resources. We also express our strong support of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and their outstanding efforts to protect the cultural heritage of the Wadis Dana, Guwayb, Faynan and tributaries in the Dana Biosphere Reserve. The archaeological and natural heritage of the Dana Biosphere and adjoining areas is unique to this world: it is a sparkling gem where the ancient past, nature, and traditional communities intersect, presenting a place of outstanding beauty and cultural heritage that is the pride of Jordan. The Dana Biosphere is globally recognised for its environmental importance, and is on Jordan’s tentative UNESCO World Heritage site list, a position now threatened by recent developments. The Dana Biosphere is famous as an example of outstanding conservation management that has successfully linked Jordanian local communities in sustainable development. As archaeologists, we emphasize the unparalleled archaeological importance of the Dana Biosphere at its current, legally established borders, which encompasses hundreds of archaeological sites spanning the Palaeolithic to the Mamluk period, creating an archaeological landscape that extends well beyond the current Biosphere boundaries.

The record of human occupation in the Dana Biosphere and surrounding areas is remarkable – it is one of the only places in the entire world that witnessed the full scale of human development and innovation, from the earliest Palaeolithic when our ancestors first migrated out of Africa and through Jordan onwards, to the Neolithic when the world’s earliest farming societies first planted barley seeds in Faynan and domesticated goats in Dana, to the Bronze and Iron Ages when this area played a central role in the development of mining, metallurgy, and trade, as well as in sustainable irrigated field systems to support the population. These developments continued under the control of the Jordanian Edomites, until the Roman period, when all copper reserves were exhausted leaving only their toxic waste. The only successful later copper extraction was by the Mamluks, who had to rework Roman slagheaps as no copper ore was available to mine, leaving a new signature of pollution that survives to this day. The small amounts of copper ore left by the ancients has saved the area from more recent mining, which is the reason this incredibly rich natural, historical, and cultural record has survived so far as the world’s best preserved ancient mining and metallurgy landscape. Dana/Faynan was a rich ore deposit in ancient times, but in modern times has lost its importance.

This uniquely well-preserved and complete landscape created by the long-term interaction between culture and nature is at the heart of the heritage of the Wadis Dana and Faynan. Decades of national and international efforts in conservation and management have been used to create a highly sustainable long-term tourism industry and an important cultural resource for Jordanian identities, and any damage would be catastrophic. Dana is the jewel in the crown of Jordanian cultural and natural heritage.

Signed by

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