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High Atlas Foundation intercultural tree planting and Clinton Global Initiative Commitment to Action ceremony

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HIGHLIGHTS

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The event will be framed around a tree planting and distribution ceremony and the signing of a Clinton Global Initiative Commitment to Action. This latter involves planting one million trees in nurseries adjoining historic rural Jewish burial sites in the Moroccan provinces of Azilal, Essaouira and Ouarzazate, for the benefit of local, disadvantaged Muslim farmers.

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Moroccan and U.S. dignitaries will include Mr. André Azoulay, Advisor to HM King Mohammed VI of Morocco, The Honorable Dwight L. Bush, Sr., Ambassador of the United States of America (who hosted a reception in support of HAF in October 2015) and Mr. Younès Al Bathaoui, Governor of Al Haouz province. Crucially, local beneficiaries, including schoolchildren, will play a prominent role.

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The sapling to be planted will be a fig, one of several endangered varieties HAF is committed to protect. A thousand mature trees of various species will be distributed to local farming families. All the trees have been raised at Akrich, just south of Marrakesh, where HAF established an organic fruit tree nursery on land lent by the Jewish community of Marrakesh-Essaouira in 2012. The nursery, managed by the local Muslim farming community, adjoins a Jewish cemetery housing the 700-year old resting place of Rabbi Raphael HaCohen, one of several hundred such locations dotted around the Kingdom.

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It is the pilot site for the House of Life initiative, which builds on and strengthens intercommunal relationships between Moroccan Muslim and Jewish communities to utilize land in this way. To date a total of 90,000 fruit seeds and saplings have been planted here, including almond, fig, lemon, pomegranate and olive. During the upcoming 2016 planting season, 30,000 mature trees from the nursery will be distributed in kind to the surrounding communities.

The name itself is a traditional term for a Jewish burial site. Symbolic of hope, it was referenced at Akrich in February 2015 by the Governor of Al Haouz during a speech which paved the way for the project to continue at a national level. In May 2015 this was formalized in the Commitment to Action under the auspices of the Clinton Global Initiative.

House of Life forms an integral part of HAF's ongoing One Billion Tree Campaign, which also includes Sami's Project, a junior educational initiative undertaken in memory of Sami El Kouhen, who passed away from cancer at the age of three. As a whole, this transformative scheme, which has already succeeded in planting over a million organic, indigenous trees and medicinal plants in 13 Moroccan provinces, aims to support the Kingdom in its bid to overcome subsistence agriculture, which lies at the root of rural poverty, and to offset severe environmental challenges including soil erosion and deforestation. Projects are determined and managed by local communities using a participatory, democratic approach.



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