



PRESS RELEASE

Driving Global Action to Protect Coral Reef with Innovative Financing, AI Monitoring, and Collaboration

Saudi Arabia Assumes Leadership of Global Coral Reef Conservation as ICRI Secretariat Commences

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – January 9, 2025 – Saudi Arabia has officially assumed the Secretariat of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) for its 14th term, marking a significant milestone in global coral reef conservation. ICRI represents 102 members including 45 countries that are custodians of 75% of the world's coral reefs.

The Kingdom's leadership for this three-year term was confirmed by ICRI members during the 38th General Meeting in September 2024, succeeding the United States. Saudi Arabia will lead this historic role through the General Organization for the Conservation of Coral Reefs and Turtles in the Red Sea (SHAMS). The virtual handover ceremony featured distinguished attendees, including Ambassador Peter Thomson, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, along with representatives from IUCN, UN Environment Program, NOAA, the U.S. Department of State and other distinguished entities.

Coral reefs, which sustain 25% of the world's marine biodiversity, contribute an estimated US\$9.9 trillion annually in goods and services, highlighting their immense ecological and economic value.

ICRI members are working under Saudi Arabia's leadership to develop the 2025–2027 Action Plan. The plan aims to expand membership to include 90% of the world's coral reefs, integrating resilient reef management into global policies and enhancing national biodiversity strategies. Key priorities include boosting the blue economy, advancing reef monitoring with innovative technologies, and utilizing insights from the upcoming "Status of Coral Reefs of the World: 2025" report. Other notable initiatives include the launch of ICRI's Youth Strategy, strengthening collaboration in the Red Sea, South Asia and East Africa regions, and raising global awareness through major events such as the UN Ocean Conference.

This milestone underscores Saudi Arabia's commitment to environmental stewardship, aligning with Vision 2030's ambitious sustainability goals and economic diversification strategy. It also complements the recently launched National Strategy for Red Sea Sustainability, announced by H.R.H. Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, which reinforces the Kingdom's dedication to conserving the Red Sea's unique marine ecosystems and creating a sustainable blue economy.

Dr. Khaled Asfahani, CEO of SHAMS and Chair of ICRI, emphasized the significance of this role: "Saudi Arabia's role as ICRI Secretariat underscores our unwavering commitment to a sustainable future for coral reefs worldwide. We are deeply grateful to ICRI members for their trust and recognition in selecting Saudi Arabia to lead this critical global initiative. Through this leadership, we aim to set new benchmarks in coral reef conservation, leveraging science, innovation, and collaboration to drive both national and



international initiatives. Our goal is to protect these vital ecosystems, ensuring their resilience for future generations while maintaining their invaluable contributions to the global economy.”

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About SHAMS

The General Organization for the Conservation of Coral Reefs and Turtles in the Red Sea (SHAMS) is the governmental body mandated to regulate, oversee, and ensure the sustainable management of Saudi Arabia’s exceptional and one of the world’s most resilient coral reefs and sea turtle ecosystems in the Red Sea. Empowered by its mandate, SHAMS leads groundbreaking research, implements large-scale restoration projects, and develops sustainable management frameworks to safeguard these critical ecosystems.

For more visit: <http://shams.gov.sa>

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About ICRI

The [International Coral Reef Initiative \(ICRI\)](http://www.icriforum.org) is a global partnership between Nations and organisations that strives to preserve coral reefs and related ecosystems around the world. The Initiative was founded in 1994 and has since grown to a network of 102 members, including 45 countries who represent over 75% of the world’s coral reefs.

For more visit: www.icriforum.org

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