ABU DHABI: Culture has been and will remain the key benchmark for the development and progress of nations, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, affirmed while receiving winners of the Sheikh Zayed Book Award (SZBA) 2016 at Al Bahr Palace.

"We, in the UAE, consider science and culture an integral part of our cultural legacy, development process and building of both human being and an open mind with a confident identity that does not compromise values, originality and heritage," Sheikh Mohammed said. His Highness congratulated the winners of the 10th edition of the award, namely the Lebanese-born French novelist, Amin Maalouf, winner of the Cultural Personality of the Year.

He appreciated the role being played by intellectual, literary and cultural personalities for instilling the values of science and knowledge in the community through their intellectual and creative works to which they deserve recognition.

His Highness also thanked guests at the fair, particularly Italian writers, who represented Italy as the guests of honour in this year's cycle of the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair (ADIBF). Their participation, His Highness noted, had allowed Arab readers to learn about the rich cultural and creative work of a country that the UAE has strong bonds of friendship with.

"The ADIBF and the SZBA, along with other cultural events in the country, underscore the recognition of the UAE, led by President His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, of the true value both science and knowledge to the community and their vital role in developing the human being and building the future through the development of thought and heightening of awareness so as to cope with transformations and address challenges," His Highness said, noting the President's initiative to make 2016 a Year for Reading.

The winners were accompanied by Dr Ali Bin Tamim, the Award's Secretary-General, a delegation from the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF), a number of key intellectuals, literary and media figures participating in the 26th Abu Dhabi International Book Fair, fair organizers, officials from the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority (TCA), as well as a group of Emirati writers.

The winners of the award expressed their delight at visiting the UAE, which they said is celebrating the Year of Reading as a landmark to encourage reading and hone literary skills of members of the community with more knowledge - the main driving force for development and cultural and human progress.

PROMOTING PEACE

Sheikh Mohammed also received on Monday at Al Bahr Palace the members of the board of trustees of The Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies.

The members were accompanied by 19 male and female students of the UAE Scholars Preparation Programme and Dr Ali Rashid Al Noaimi, Managing Director of Al Mawta's Centre.

Sheikh Mohammed welcomed his guests and exchanged talks with them about the forum and its role in spreading awareness of the Islamic approach based on the values of tolerance, justice and peace and renouncing extremism, violence and sectarian discrimination.

Sheikh Mohammed underlined the necessity for everybody to shoulder the responsibility of giving the real and true image of Islam, stressing the role of scholars in highlighting the principles of Islam and refuting the claims of those who were trying to distort it.