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|  | **CI/DHE/2022/34** |

**The 30th Anniversary of the Memory of the World Programme**

***A Commemorative Statement[[1]](#footnote-2)***

**Introduction**

Documentary heritage in archives, libraries and beyond represents our collective memories in tangible form. These collective memories make up a shared pool of our knowledge, experience, expression, and humanity – they are the bedrocks of communities and civilizations. Failure to preserve the world’s documentary heritage would be a great loss to the shared heritage of humanity.

UNESCO’s long-standing commitment to the safeguarding of the world’s documentary heritage came originally from a growing awareness of the fragility of this heritage, as well as its perilous state of preservation and limited access in various parts of the world. Wars and social upheaval, as well as severe lack of resources to carry out preservation and dissemination activities have aggravated risk factors that have existed for centuries.

The Memory of the World (MoW) Programme was established by UNESCO in 1992 to safeguard the world’s documentary heritage, democratize access to it and raise awareness of its significance, and most importantly, the need to preserve it.

Over the last 30 years, the MoW Programme has achieved important milestones in ensuring that the world’s documentary heritage is preserved, protected, and accessible to all, while advocating for effective policy mechanisms and promoting cooperation at national and international levels.

These significant milestones include the inscription of 432 documentary heritage items and collections from all over the world on the MoW International Register[[2]](#footnote-3); the establishment of three MoW regional committees in the African, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean regions, along with national committees in 95 countries; as well as the establishment of the UNESCO International Centre for Documentary Heritage.

Celebrating the 30th anniversary of the MoW Programme goes beyond commemorating the diverse and important documents that are already part of the MoW Register, preserving the legacy of previous generations. It embraces those documents generated today, largely produced and disseminated digitally, which can only be bequeathed to new generations if they are created and preserved in ways that preserve their integrity and authenticity. Without them, the history of our times will be a gap, and the difficulties we have gone through and the solutions we try to give to the problems we face will not be documented, resulting in a reduced understanding of our time and, certainly, that of the future.

Efforts made by memory institutions and individuals to preserve documentary heritage and enable its access have been recognized and celebrated through UNESCO/Jikji MoW Prize. The MoW Global Policy Forum has become the strategic platform for discussion and knowledge-sharing, particularly on disaster risk reduction and management, providing support to Member States in implementing the *UNESCO 2015 Recommendation concerning the preservation of, and access to, documentary heritage including in digital form*. Initiatives in digital documentary heritage, such as PERSIST and Software Source Code as Heritage are also progressing. Reaching out to the younger generation, the programme has also embraced a strategy to introduce documentary heritage through educational materials and learning activities.

This year, the MoW Programme is celebrating its 30th anniversary. This is a great opportunity to celebrate these achievements and look ahead to the future of the Programme. In this view, there is a strong need to promote the contribution of documentary heritage to the development of a sustainable, peaceful, and inclusive society that ensures justice for all.

1. **Positioning documentary heritage in the larger cultural ecosystem**

In marking this anniversary, we embrace the theme: ***“Your window to the world: Enlisting documentary heritage to promote inclusive, just and peaceful societies”.***

In itself, the theme is a mark of true partnership: It brings together the Co-ordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations (CCAAA)’s multi-year theme for the World Day for Audiovisual Heritage, “Your Window to the World”, with the theme of the MoW Programme’s 30th anniversary celebration, “Enlisting documentary heritage to promote inclusive, just and peaceful societies”.

As such, on 27 October 2022, we celebrate both the World Day for Audiovisual Heritage and the 30th anniversary of the MoW Programme.

Beyond the dual theme, the celebration represents the coming together of **diverse memory institutions** working across different types of documentary heritage including:

* Archives, represented by the International Council on Archives (ICA);
* Audiovisual archives including sound, film and broadcasting represented by CCAAA;
* Libraries, represented by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA);

In various ways, these institutions, in cooperation with the MoW Programme, are developing administrative and technical standards for the preservation and accessibility of documentary heritage in all its diverse genres and formats, thereby ensuring that all people can appreciate its value within a larger cultural ecosystem.

In parallel with efforts made by these institutions and the MoW Programme, there is a compelling need for Member States to strengthen their role of positioning documentary heritage in the larger cultural ecosystem.

The 2015 Recommendation concerning the preservation of, and access to, documentary heritage including in digital form encourages Member States to *“contribute to building synergies between the Memory of the World Programme and other heritage programmes in order to assure further coherence of actions.”*

This can be done by ensuring that documentary heritage is part of frameworks for safeguarding cultural heritage, developed at the national level in line with relevant UNESCO cultural conventions. This is especially relevant in terms of addressing challenges in the fields of preservation and protection that include disaster risk reduction; legal and/or technological restrictions on preservation and access; education and promotion; as well as opportunities and challenges related to information and communications technology developments.

By taking a comprehensive view of the cultural ecosystem, one that includes documentary heritage, Member States can strengthen their efforts to preserve and provide access to all forms of heritage, and implement the 2015 Recommendation in parallel to UNESCO’s other standard-setting instruments in the field of cultural heritage.

1. **Documentary heritage in a fast-evolving context: turning threats into opportunities**

Documentary heritage is fragile and especially susceptible to a great number of hazards. Without appropriate management and preservation, including that in digital format, this material is at risk of being lost forever.

In the past decades, documentary heritage has been impacted by a host of destructive forces. In the first instance, it has fallen victim to its own fragility and instability, but beyond this, brutal wars, social upheaval, and other natural and human-caused disasters have resulted in its destruction. Furthermore, over the last two years, it has been caught up in a fast-changing information landscape, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, within all of these threats is the opportunity for memory institutions to adapt, including by embracing digital innovation to preserve and enhance the accessibility of documentary heritage.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, more and more memory institutions have improved the accessibility of their collections via digital access on a much larger scale. Such threats have also led to new forms of national and international cooperation among memory institutions, where the widespread adoption of virtual meetings have allowed experts, regardless of their geographical locations, to take part in discussions, further highlighting the need for concerted action on safeguarding documentary heritage as “the memory of the world”.

Throughout these challenges, it has also become increasingly clear that documentary heritage can act as a source of scientific, educational, aesthetic and cultural value for citizens, memory institutions and governments. It offers a glimpse into how people and governments in the past coped with challenges similar to those faced today. For example, surviving documentation on the 1918 Influenza Pandemic, which lasted until 1920, offers first-hand evidence of how individuals, communities and governments managed the pandemic. This response was against the backdrop of government-imposed lockdown measures on archives, libraries, museums and other public places, and therefore resonates with the lived experience of many today.

Recognition of the many threats to documentary heritage has placed an increased focus on the need to invest in education and awareness raising across generations on the shared value of humankind’s documentary heritage. This must be targeted to all members of society, of all ages and at all levels within the formal education system and beyond. This is already central to the mission of memory institutions.

1. **Towards the robust and effective use of documentary heritage**

Efforts to preserve and provide access to documentary heritage are vital. However, what has perhaps been underemphasized is the next step enabled by these efforts.

The question to be asked is, therefore, **“How can memory institutions connect their collections to users of all types, at all levels, and realize the societal potential of their collections?”**

Documentary heritage has a strong role to play in fostering knowledge-based dialogues, including intercultural dialogue. In general, this dialogue can promote understanding between different societies or cultures regardless of geographically distances, and thus facilitate reconciliation and peace. By maximizing cooperation among memory institutions around the world, this potential can best be realized.

In this regard, regional and national MoW committees are in the best position to promote documentary heritage as it relates to human rights, democracy and social justice movements. Further they should continue to encourage Member States to submit joint nominations to the MoW International Register, or otherwise engage their counterparts from other countries in trans-border or sub-regional activities on common heritage.

These efforts to promote the robust and effective use of documentary heritage and wider recognition of its value can help inform and connect citizens and, in turn, help them participate in promoting inclusive, just and peaceful societies – the theme of the 30th anniversary celebration.

1. **The role of Documentary Heritage in Sustainable Development**

The fundamental role of documentary heritage in informing inclusive, just and peaceful societies is rooted in **the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.

**Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16** seeks to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. **Target 16.10** of this SDG aims to “ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.”

Therefore, practical steps to realize the potential of documentary heritage to promote peaceful, just and inclusive societies, are required.

This can be facilitated by positioning the documentary heritage collections held in libraries, archives, museums, and other memory institutions as informational resources linking the past, present and future. All stakeholders, within memory institutions and beyond, must consider documentary heritage as a resource for facilitating both “public access to information” and the enjoyment of fundamental freedoms, including the right to cultural participation.

More specifically, positioning documentary heritage as a contributing factor in building inclusive, just and peaceful societies requires an effort to:

1. Ensure that documentary heritage is protected within memory institutions;
2. Make it readily available and accessible to all;
3. Promote its use and re-use as a matter of fundamental freedoms.

These ideas are also expressed in the 2015 Recommendation, which underlines “the importance of documentary heritage to promote the sharing of knowledge for greater understanding and dialogue, in order to promote peace and respect for freedom, democracy, human rights and dignity.”

Taking into account this conceptual framework and the overall goal of the MoW Programme of safeguarding documentary heritage, the **key issues** that may define the use of documentary heritage to promote inclusive, just and peaceful societies could be set out as follows:

1. Identifying documentary heritage which promotes greater understanding and dialogue across cultures;
2. Celebrating documentary heritage, including that of marginalized groups, which contributed to bringing about inclusive, just, and peaceful societies in a particular national, regional or international context;
3. Highlighting the gender, socio-economic inequalities in access to, and usage of, documentary heritage;
4. Enhancing how documentary heritage can be used as an educational resource and how media can utilise the historical value of documentary heritage for contemporary reporting on issues of sustainable development;
5. Monitoring the global situation of documentary heritage preservation, spotting endangered areas facing difficulties due to technical and/or economic factors;
6. Highlighting best practices on safeguarding documentary heritage at risk including enhanced capacity building, specifically for digital preservation;
7. Ensuring that documentary heritage collections and the memory institutions which safeguard them are integrated into national cultural property protection frameworks, including in efforts to combat theft and illicit trafficking, and are protected during crises – both natural and human-caused.
8. **Where do we go from here?**

It is clear that documentary heritage, within the framework of the MoW Programme and its network of partnerships, is an informational resource that has an essential role in a culture-based model of sustainable development for the wellbeing of all.

Preserving and providing access to documentary heritage material, including as concerns web archiving, is therefore a core public interest activity and so should not be subject to any unreasonable and unjustified restrictions. Memory institutions need clear and enforceable legal rights to carry out their missions, and the creation and sharing of new content with open licenses, including the promotion of OpenGLAM practices, should be encouraged.

In celebrating the MoW Programme’s 30th anniversary, it is time to multiply our efforts to safeguard documentary heritage in all its diversity and take a stand to help it to fulfil its cultural and educational purposes. Professional expertise is needed to ensure that documents keep their central role as the foundation of civilization and its further development.

Concerted but targeted action is required. The **next steps** may be summarized as follows:

1. **Strategically identify documentary heritage** which promotes international cooperation and understanding, as well as intercultural dialogue, and promote its use across borders as a resource in memory, scientific and educational institutions. Artistic and creative records of humankind are a source of social connectivity – they can help to bring people together and work towards international solidarity.
2. **Further make use of the potential of documentary heritage** to help predict and handle crises or emergencies. This includes actively adopting a disaster risk reduction framework to better understand and prepare for natural and human-caused disasters. Similar forward-looking lessons should be learned from conflicts, especially the recent and ongoing ones. For example, many countries are adopting national guidelines for the preservation of official documents on efforts to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. These materials not only document the great impact this pandemic has had on society, but can also act as a fundamental reference to help understand and contextualize health crises in the future.
3. **Work towards more innovative ways** to make use of the 400+ items of documentary heritage inscribed on the Memory of the World International Register with the goal of bringing further attention to the need for the continued preservation and accessibility of the entire documentary heritage within the framework of the UNESCO 2015 Recommendation*.* In this vein, we laud UNESCO’s engagement with [Google Arts & Culture](https://artsandculture.google.com/project/memory-of-the-world) to enhance the visibility of the inscriptions via this online platform. There are similar efforts being developed, such as a plan by the International Centre for Documentary Heritage and other organizations to create an advanced information-sharing platform for documentary heritage. Such platforms allow for the identification of nationally, regionally and internationally inscribed items of documentary heritage. These tools can help illuminate common patterns, promote understanding and dialogue across all cultures, and celebrate the cultural heritage of marginalized groups, thereby promoting social inclusion and a just and peaceful coexistence.

As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the MoW Programme and the World Day for Audiovisual Heritage, we join the entire documentary heritage community – represented by experts drawn from the Programme’s network of national and regional committees as well as international partner organizations – in reaffirming our commitment to “record to remember, preserve to protect, and educate to utilize.”

1. This Commemorative Statement is coordinated by the International Centre for Documentary Heritage (a Category 2 Centre under the auspices of UNESCO. Its content was shaped by documentary heritage experts drawn from the Memory of the World (MoW) Programme’s network of national and regional committees and international non-governmental organizations. It represents their voice on the issues that define this 30th anniversary of the establishment of the MoW Programme. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. As of October 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)