



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Fundraising project for safeguarding and  
promoting UNESCO's documentary heritage



# Digitizing our shared UNESCO history





# The treasures within

The Mexican poet and Director-General of UNESCO from 1948 to 1952, Jaime Torres-Bodet, once declared that archives, rather than “vast cemeteries”, are places where one may find “the experiences, adventures, risks and dramas” of society. He saw them as crucial to the “continuity of the human conscience” and the possibility of good government; they contain the “instructive traces of life”.

In UNESCO’s archives and historical audiovisual collections you can find evidence of 70 years of ideas and actions for peace and international understanding within the Organization’s wide-ranging fields of competence. Here are some examples of the numerous activities on which one may find texts, sound and images in the archives:

- Literacy campaigns, “fundamental education”, projects on providing quality education for girls and women all the world over
- Safeguarding cultural heritage in all its forms, from the temples of Abu Simbel through the heritage at risk from flooding in Venice and Florence to the manuscripts of Timbuktu
- Applying sciences and technology for development, creating the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), promoting space communications and tsunami warning systems
- Defending the safety of journalists, reducing the digital divide, supporting rural media and the free flow of information, building inclusive knowledge societies
- Promoting intercultural dialogue, fighting racism and all forms of discrimination
- Developing UNESCO as a laboratory of ideas through the contributions of eminent intellectuals and personalities, such as Amadou Hampâté Bâ, Jorge Luis Borges, Taha Hussein, Alva Myrdal, Yehudi Menuhin, Jawaharlal Nehru and thousands of others
- Projects and activities in Member States, from village schools and public libraries to global meetings



# UNESCO's documentary heritage:

preservation, digitization, access

**We should practice what we preach and safeguard our own documentary heritage by preserving, digitizing and making archives in all formats universally accessible.**

UNESCO has therefore launched a project for the digitization of the Organization's archives dating back to its predecessors, such as the League of Nations' International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation. The purpose is to preserve and make key parts of our collective memory available to a large public. This can only be done with the active support of Member States and other interested partners.

## WHY this initiative?

**Because these archives are**

- **Important for UNESCO** and its stakeholders (countries and partners). They tell the story of ideas and actions, programmes and projects, and the efforts attempted and/or achieved to fulfil UNESCO's noble mission.
- **At risk.** This is particularly true for the audiovisual collections that date back to the late 1940s (films, videos, audio recordings and photos). Many formats are deteriorating and invaluable documents may soon be lost. To preserve our documentary heritage we must act now.
- **Sources of evidence on the history of international cooperation.** As such, they document much more than UNESCO itself – they also provide evidence for telling the stories of how individual countries have participated in activities on education, communication, culture and the sciences, and how newly independent states have developed and built programmes in all those areas.



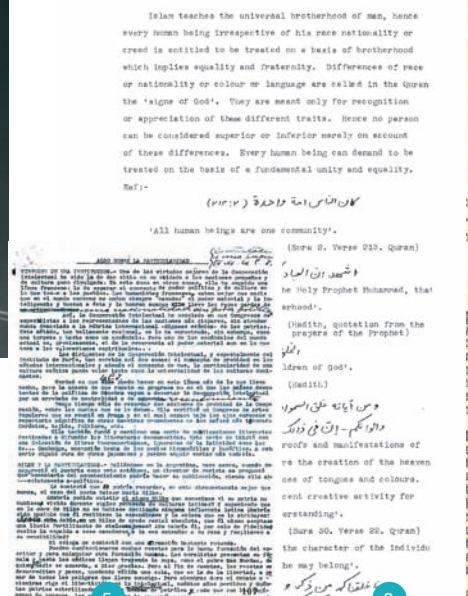
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# Ten examples

1 / In 1964 **Jorge Luis Borges** spoke at UNESCO about the significance of dream in Shakespeare's Hamlet. The audio recording is preserved along with 30,000 others, many of which are of great historical value.

2 / **Amadou Hampâté Bâ** was a representative on UNESCO's Executive Board from 1962 to 1970. His interventions were often memorable, in particular when he referred to West African oral traditions: "In Africa, when an old man dies, it is a library burning". They can be found in documents of the governing bodies and/or the audio recordings of meetings.

3 / In 1960, the French writer and Minister of Culture **André Malraux** launched UNESCO's campaign to safeguard Nubian monuments from Abu Simbel to Philae (Egypt). He praised the "act by which man snatches something from death". This intervention exists on film and in a text version.

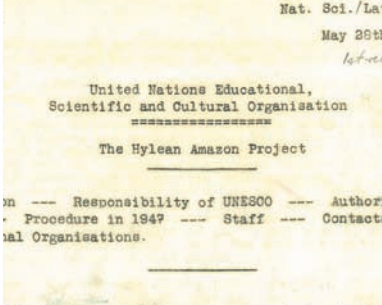
4 / **Albert Einstein** was a member of the League of Nations commission in charge of the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation (1925-1946), the precursor of UNESCO. The Institute's archives have been deposited with the

UNESCO Archives and constitute a precious source of knowledge on intellectual cooperation between the two world wars.

5 / **Gabriela Mistral**, the Chilean poet awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1945, participated actively in the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation and her related correspondence and manuscripts, which form part of the archives preserved by UNESCO, represent an example of early thinking on the importance of cultural diversity in the context of international cooperation.

6 / In 1949, UNESCO organized an exhibition in Paris on human rights and their historical background in support of the **United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. In the follow-up, 12,000 copies of the exhibition album were printed and distributed around the world. One of the results was a proposal from the Government of Pakistan to enhance the exhibition with Islamic contributions to the progress of human rights.

7 / **The International Institute of the Hylean Amazon** was UNESCO's first flagship project in the field of the natural sciences. The purpose of the Institute was to promote the flora



**Introduction.** The Hylean Amazon Project was... Commission of UNESCO in May 1946 by the Brazilian... of the original memorandum and of that... Conference of UNESCO are attached to this... The original memorandum explains how the... his forest-region of tropical South America has... it seems that further progress can best be... al co-operation.

It was considered that, in the first place, the... action of UNESCO might be the means of co-ordi... the biological and anthropological exploration... such work had been carried out mainly through... tutes, or by private persons, in Europe, South... ca. A large amount of material had been coll... and a very considerable body of knowledge had... ults were too widely scattered. In effect, the... to pass to the second stage of intensive resea... se of the lack of sufficient study-material ar... ries in the Hylean Amazon itself.

## Unesco mathematical model to harness the Mekong

by W. J. Ellis

**T**HE 2,600-mile-long Mekong, one of the great rivers of the world, rises at an altitude of over 16,000 feet in the mountains of the Tibetan plateau.

It is perennial and flows unrestricted through Yunnan Province in China and Burma before it enters the Lower Mekong Basin, where, in Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and the Republic of Viet Nam, it is influenced by the monsoon rains collected mainly from the equatorial continent of the Indonesian Archipelago. Only 14 per cent of the river's water has its origin in Tibet and China.

From the Burmese border, the river flows a tortuous course for sixteen hundred miles before it is lost through the great delta into the South China Sea.

It is estimated that the total drainage area is 327,000 square miles (800,000 sq. km.) and of this, 238,000 square miles (600,500 sq. km.), an area larger than France, lies within the four countries of the Lower Basin.

Mr. I. GILPIN of Australia, was formerly director of the United Nations Commission Office for South East Asia Affairs and South Asia (UNCSA). He is now with the Unesco Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation at Paris. Before joining Unesco he was a biologist on the staff of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation at Melbourne, Australia.



and fauna of the "Hylean Amazon", a vast area of equatorial South America, thus introducing an early focus on biodiversity and its meaning for humanity. Owing to political difficulties, the project did not develop into the ambitious international undertaking that it was meant to be, but lessons from the experience and possible inspiration for future endeavours can be found in the archives.

**8/** In the 1960s, UNESCO developed a **mathematical model for the Mekong River Delta** with a view to the comprehensive development of water resources to the benefit of the peoples in the region. UNESCO carried out this important study as an executing agency of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and in cooperation with the governments of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Viet Nam.

**9/** **Removing barriers for the free flow of information and building capacities in the fields of media, communication and information** have been a dual challenge for UNESCO since its inception. In the immediate post-war period, reconstruction was the battle cry and UNESCO launched a worldwide survey to identify the technical needs for press, radio and film.

**10/** "Fundamental education" was one of the very first priorities of UNESCO and **literacy campaigns** were an essential part of this universal fight against ignorance. Mission reports, project documents and publications in multiple formats (including radio and film) bear witness to UNESCO's continued involvement in this field, which continues today with its advocacy for quality education for all as a common goal for the United Nations.

# By collection



## Paper records

10,000 linear meters (lm):

- International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (115 lm)
- Relations between UNESCO and Member States (195 lm)
- Project and activity files
- Outstanding personalities
- Actions in the field



## Audiovisual heritage

**30,000** audio recordings: UNESCO Radio reports and interviews and other recordings from the 1940s to the 1980s

**3,500** films and videos on UNESCO activities

**170,000** photos, including negatives and slides, documenting UNESCO's actions from 1945 to the present day



## Governing bodies

**37** regular and 4 extraordinary sessions of the General Conference;  
**195** sessions of the Executive Board

- General Conference and Executive Board documents **from the late 1940s and the 1950s currently exist in paper versions only**
- If these documents are digitized, all documents of the UNESCO governing bodies will be **available for Internet searches via UNESDOC** (the Organization's documentary database)
- This means that it will be possible **to trace the background for any governing body decision and action on the Web** in a reliable and comprehensive way, from the inception of UNESCO to the present day



# HOW you can participate in the digitization project

Contact the Chief Archivist of UNESCO to find out more about selections and how you can contribute:  
archives@unesco.org

Global target amount: 3,000,000 USD



## HIGHLIGHTS

➤ Standard cost: 7,500 USD

You can choose to contribute to the preservation and digitization of **selected files or documents on a campaign or project**, for example, such as sound recordings of leading intellectuals or political figures or documents on a specific activity.



## COUNTRY

➤ Standard cost: 30,000 USD

You can focus on **key documents** – paper and/or audiovisual – on your country's relations with UNESCO. This would include both official relations and major UNESCO activities in your country, or activities in other parts of the world in which your country has been involved.



## GENERAL SUPPORT

Standard cost: Any amount from 5,000 USD

**You can contribute an amount of your choice** to the preserving and digitizing of UNESCO's documentary heritage and allow UNESCO Archives to decide on the priorities. This would therefore amount to general support for the project, for which you would be duly acknowledged.

Discover more  
about UNESCO's archives



[www.unesco.org/archives](http://www.unesco.org/archives)

**If you wish to know more  
or contribute to this project,  
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