



Celebration of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Memory of the World Programme

A CONCEPT NOTE



Enlisting
documentary
heritage to
promote
inclusive, just
and peaceful
societies

27 Oct - 5 Nov 2022



#MemoryOfTheWorld
#DocumentaryHeritage

<https://en.unesco.org/programme/mow>

Background

The concept of Memory of the World (MoW) evolved in the early 1990s, following the creation of the UNESCO Sector for Communication, Information and Informatics in 1990, under which had been assigned the implementation of the General Information Programme (PGI). The General Conference of UNESCO in 1991 invited the Director-General, Federico Mayor Zaragoza, “with regard to archives, to promote the safeguard of, and access to the archival heritage, through: advisory services on the establishment of regional audio-visual technical laboratories, and audio-visual archives development plans in four Member States; the reconstitution of the archival heritage through microfilming”. The widespread use of the internet was still in the future but growing global concern about the preservation of fragile and endangered documents was a contemporary reality.

In order to help prevent the irrevocable loss of collective memory, UNESCO thus set up the MoW Programme in 1992. In 2015, UNESCO’s Member States adopted the 2015 Recommendation Concerning the Preservation of, and Access to Documentary Heritage, Including in Digital Form, which represented their common resolve to take appropriate actions aimed at achieving the different aspects of documentary heritage, including identification, preservation, access, policy mechanisms as well as national and international cooperation.



"The Golden Letter of the Burmese King Alaungphaya to King George II of Great Britain of 7 May 1756"
© Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Library. Inscribed in UNESCO Memory of the World Register by Germany, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Myanmar in 2015.

The vision of the MoW Programme is that the world's documentary heritage belongs to all, should be fully preserved and protected for all and, with due recognition of cultural mores and practicalities, should be permanently accessible to all without hindrance.

The mission of the MoW Programme is to increase awareness and protection of the world's documentary heritage, and achieve its universal and permanent accessibility.

Three key objectives thus underpin the MoW Programme, namely:

- to facilitate preservation, by the most appropriate techniques, of the world's past, present and future documentary heritage;
- to assist universal access to documentary heritage. This may be done by encouraging institutions and individuals holding documentary heritage to make it accessible as widely and equitably as possible, in analogue and/or digital form, as appropriate;
- to increase awareness worldwide of the existence and significance of documentary heritage and thereby foster dialogue and mutual understanding between people and cultures.

30 years on

2022 marks the 30th anniversary of the MoW Programme. During this period, the Programme has registered remarkable success, including:

- Strengthening Member States' safeguarding, preservation and accessibility of documentary heritage, with 94 Member States setting up national MoW committees, which are often used as vehicles for the implementation of the 2015 Recommendation. Seventeen are in Africa.
- Establishment of three regional MoW committees in the African, Asia Pacific as well as the Latin America and Caribbean regions.
- Over 400 inscriptions on the MoW International Register, accompanied by a strengthened system of managing the Register which incorporates inter-governmental oversight, impartial UNESCO Secretariat administration of the Programme, and independent expertise.
- Capacity building of memory institutions, including for enhanced digitization of documentary heritage to make it more widely accessible;



Therefore, documentary heritage, as an information resource, lends itself both to the “public access to information” component of **Target of 16.10** of **SDG 16** and its “fundamental freedoms” component. With respect to the theme of the celebration, while the question of ensuring universal access to documentary heritage remains a foundational concern, there is a strong focus on how documentary heritage can be used to promote inclusive, just and peaceful societies. This speaks to one of the central concerns of the 2015 Recommendation, namely “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.” In this respect, the 2015 Recommendation also embraces the idea that “... the preservation of, and long-term accessibility to documentary heritage underpins fundamental freedoms of opinion, expression, and information as human rights.”

In this respect, key issues that may define the celebration of the 30th anniversary would include:

- Identifying documentary heritage, including that inscribed on national, regional and international registers of the MoW Programme, which promotes greater understanding and dialogue across cultures.
- Celebrating documentary heritage of marginalized groups, such as indigenous people. Member States that are a home to such groups could consider highlighting this aspect of their societies in order to promote inclusivity, thereby enhancing the possibility of just and peaceful co-existence.
- Highlighting the gender inequalities in access to, and usage of, documentary heritage across archives, libraries, museums, etc.
- Celebrating national world-significant documents that have had a phenomenal impact on a community, a culture, a country or humanity generally. Many examples abound, but the determination of these is left to Member States.
- Exploiting the educational value of documentary heritage to enrich existing curricula with under-utilized primary sources.
- Exploring how media and journalists can exploit the historical value of documentary heritage for contemporary reporting on issues of sustainable development.
- Celebrating national, regional and international documents that may be deemed as having contributed the most towards bringing about inclusive, just and peaceful societies in a particular national, regional or international context.
- Highlighting best practices on safeguarding documentary heritage at risk.

There are many more aspects of this theme that can be exploited for maximum effect.



*"Bayasāngħori Shāhñāmeħ" (Prince Bayasāngħor's Book of the Kings).
© Golestan Palace. Inscribed in UNESCO Memory of the World
Register by the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2007.*

Implementation partnerships

National and regional MoW committees, working with UNESCO field offices, will be key to conducting these celebrations. UNESCO's Category 2 Centre – the International Centre for Documentary Heritage – will also drive some of the activities. Other partners, including international non-governmental organizations working in the field of documentary heritage, are also at liberty to organize events that play to the strengths of the theme and highlight their own institutional priorities.

In this respect, interested organizations can alert the MoW Programme Secretariat as to what they intend to organize in celebration of the 30th anniversary (mowsecretariat@unesco.org). Such activities will be highlighted on the MoW website.

Period

The celebrations will be held from **27 October to 5 November 2022**. 27 October is selected, not necessarily for its historical link to the establishment of the MoW Programme, but because it is the World Day for Audiovisual Heritage. Historically, the origins of the MoW Programme is linked to an Experts' Meeting which was held in Paris on 22 June 1992 whose elements gave the MoW Programme its present, including the basic tasks of preservation and restoration; the will to establish an International Advisory Committee (IAC); principal partners such as ICA and IFLA as well as partners in the private sector identified; and some basic ideas for Guidelines.



<https://www.mowcalendar.org/>



"Asian-African Conference Archives" © National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia. Inscribed in UNESCO Memory of the World Register by Indonesia in 2015.

Global celebration

Given the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, global celebrations, coordinated by the Documentary Heritage Unit, will take three forms:

1. A global exhibition of selected MoW International Register inscriptions via 30 posters displayed along the fence of the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris for a week (27 October – 5 November 2022). Alongside this, two/three kakemonos dedicated to the celebration will be produced and placed at strategic points.
2. An online-onsite symposium that will feature a keynote speech, unpacking the theme, by a documentary heritage luminary, a series of testimonies by memory institutions that have benefited from the MoW Programme over the years (these testimonies could be in the form of short videos), as well as showcasing items of documentary heritage that promote inclusion, justice, and peace. The symposium will be co-organized by the Documentary Heritage Unit and the International Centre for Documentary Heritage.
3. An anniversary statement prepared by the chairpersons of regional committees and co-signed by key partners of UNESCO, including IFLA, ICA, CCAAA, ICOM, etc., coordinated by the International Centre for Documentary Heritage. In regions without regional committees, selected national committees' chairpersons will be co-opted into the drafting of the anniversary statement. The statement will also speak to the global theme.

National celebration

Possible activities that could be implemented by national and regional committees as well as our partners include:

- Exhibitions
- Launching of publications, or initiating an activity around existing publications, including those produced by the MoW Programme in the last 12 months (e-calendar, e-course, digitization manual, etc.)
- Launching national registers, where these do not exist
- Media events to promote the work of the national and/or regional committee
- Quizzes for children attending library sessions, etc.
- Production of YouTube videos highlighting different aspects of the global theme in context. Such videos can be placed on the MoW website.

Contact details: mowsecretariat@unesco.org