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International Conference on the Future of the Memory of the World Programme: Outcome Document

Korean National Commission for UNESCO, Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Introduction

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea and the Korean National Commission for UNESCO co-hosted the International Conference on the Future of the Memory of the World (MoW) Programme in Seoul from 8 to 9 September 2025 as an international conference and expert meeting in order to contribute to the continued development of the MoW Programme. The MoW experts participating in the conference (MoW experts) engaged in strategic reflection, fostering regional and international linkages, and identifying actionable recommendations for the future of the MoW Programme.¹

In the spirit of the preamble to the UNESCO Constitution, “Believing... in the unrestricted pursuit of objective truth, and in the free exchange of ideas and knowledge...”, the MoW experts in the conference reflected on the outcomes of the 2021 comprehensive review of the MoW Programme, and considered the ongoing and emerging challenges that the Programme faces, along with the direction that the Programme should take in the future.

The MoW experts acknowledged with satisfaction the achievements of the MoW Programme, including the number of inscriptions in its international and regional registers, the significant growth and energy of national and regional committees and knowledge centres, and the various exhibitions, publications, conferences, workshops, and educational tools that have been created and held under its auspices.

While recognising these achievements, the MoW experts also explored possibilities for further improvements for the future of the Programme, particularly in the light of the perilous state of documentary heritage around the world. The following is a summary of the outcomes of these discussions on future improvements for the Programme.

Expanding the Programme’s Scope and Outreach

1. Increase Global Inclusivity: The Programme needs to continue working to become more inclusive, equitable, and responsive with respect to the world’s cultural diversity—particularly with regard to underrepresented regions such as Africa, the Arab States, and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), as well as with respect to women, minority groups, and underrepresented topics such as popular culture, indigenous languages, and oral traditions.

2. Expand Cooperation with other UNESCO Programmes: The MoW Programme should

¹ The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the MoW experts and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Ministry of the Republic of Korea and the Korean National Commission for UNESCO.

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be encouraged to build stronger synergies with other UNESCO conventions and programmes—particularly World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage, to streamline activities and better reflect diverse cultural realities.

3. **Encourage creation of Memory of the World Knowledge Centres:** The network of Knowledge Centres should be strengthened as an integral part of the MoW Programme, since it is key to expanding its global reach and providing technical, educational, and other forms of support to underrepresented regions. Formal recognition of the MoW Knowledge Centres by the Memory of the World Programme should be considered.
4. **Foster South-South Cooperation:** Exploration of partnerships and exchange of knowledge should be further encouraged among nations in the Global South to strengthen their documentary heritage efforts.
5. **Broaden Partnerships:** Expansion of cooperation with civil society, NGOs, the private sector, international academic associations and educational institutions should be encouraged to enhance the Programme's reach and impact.
6. **Strengthen National and Regional Committees:** Further efforts should be made to establish new national and regional MoW committees and consolidate existing ones.
7. **Explore options for a Convention on Documentary Heritage:** Recognizing the fundamental value of the 2015 Recommendation, and aspiring to a more visible and efficient MoW Programme, UNESCO and its Category II Centre (ICDH) are encouraged to explore ways and means for the development of a specific Convention on Documentary Heritage, similar to the conventions for World Heritage properties and for Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Adopting New Methodologies and Principles

1. **Recognise the Growing Impact of Digital Technology:** The Programme should embrace the ubiquity of digital documentary heritage, encouraging the use of new and emerging technologies – including post-digital thinking and carefully applied Artificial Intelligence – and developing “hybrid strategies” that consider the inseparable relationship between analogue and digital contexts.
2. **Leverage the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The Programme should emphasize its alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to strengthen its contribution to current issues such as climate change, gender equality, and justice.
3. **Re-emphasize the Code of Ethics:** Measures should be taken to highlight the Programme’s Code of Ethics in order to prevent conflicts of interest and ensure integrity and transparency.
4. **Focus on Preservation in Conflict Zones:** Efforts should be made to encourage the Memory of the World community to take a stronger stance against the intentional destruction of documentary heritage in conflict zones and support initiatives that

document destroyed heritage.

5. **Promote Community-Centred Curation:** Individuals and communities should be involved as active contributors to memory-making practices and preservation.

Creating New Approaches for Dialogue concerning Contested Nominations

1. **Establish a Time Limit for Dialogue:** The current lack of time limit for dialogue on contested nominations foreseen by the General Guidelines in the section dedicated to the Incidental Process, is an impediment to solving disputes in the interest of inscribing new nominations. Learning from the practice of the World Heritage Committee, which has successfully resolved disputes through transparency, limited time for dialogue, and voting in the absence of consensus, the MoW Programme should limit the time available for dialogue to four years. If that period elapses, contested nominations should be discussed by the Register SubCommittee and the International Advisory Committee, and a decision be taken by vote, if no consensus can be reached through dialogue.
2. **Encourage Joint Nominations:** Joint nominations can help prevent potential contestations, while building international cooperation, and they should be strongly encouraged, in particular those that have been called into question and are subject to dialogue. As proposed in the previous version of the General Guidelines for the MoW Programme, approved by the IAC in 2017, “The outcome of such a dialogue could be: a) A joint nomination, or b) Agreement on an inscription including opinions showing differing perspectives on the events or facts reflected in the nominated document”. In case none of these outcomes are reached after two cycles (i.e. a maximum of four years after submission of the nomination), the procedure described just previously should apply, with a final decision taken by the IAC.
3. **Enhance Transparency:** The process for handling contestations should be more transparent. Contestations, including their argumentation, should be made available on the nomination platform, for a comprehensive and accurate public record of proceedings.
4. **Explain the Meaning of “Other Grounds”:** The phrase “other grounds” (*General Guidelines* 8.6.5.2.) as a basis for contestation is ambiguous and should be explained in the *Memory of the World Register Companion*. For more clarity, it is necessary to specify what other grounds for contestation are meant, next to the technical grounds detailed in the General Guidelines.
5. **Clarify Paragraph 8.2.2. concerning “Inadmissible nominations”:** It should be clarified in the *Memory of the World Register Companion* that the fifth clause in paragraph 8.2.2 of the *General Guidelines*, regarding “Any documents that promote issues and ideas in opposition to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations ...”, is not meant to exclude nominations of documents which relate to ‘negative’ historical occurrences, of which there are many instances already inscribed on the International MoW Register, and which, by definition, reference such things as hate speech, racism,

denial of human rights and discrimination. It should further be clarified that the purpose of paragraph 8.2.2 is only to exclude nominations where it is the deliberate intent of the nominator to promote issues contrary to the purposes of the United Nations and the Constitution of UNESCO, as opposed to simply recognizing significant documentary heritage on its own merits.

The MoW experts who participated in the International Conference on the Future of the Memory of the World Programme trust that the above considerations and recommendations will be useful in promoting further dialogue among Member States and all bodies involved in the MoW Programme to ensure and improve its continuing significance and effectiveness.