# UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme and heritage protection conventions

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To mark the 20th anniversary of the *Memory of the World* Programme, on 19 November 2012 in the Félix Eboué Room at the Ministry for Overseas France, 57 Boulevard des Invalides, Paris, the French National Commission for UNESCO (CNFU) held a Programme information and outreach day for librarians, archivists and Regional Cultural Affairs Directorates from all over France.
This text was written for that occasion, in order to place the Programme within the context of UNESCO.

Original French version by: Anne-Sabine Sabater

Translated by: French Foreign Affairs Ministry Translation Unit

# UNESCO's *Memory of the World* Programme and heritage protection conventions

As part of its heritage protection work, UNESCO has established several instruments – conventions and/or programmes – whose titles cover both specific heritage-related fields and situations and/or contexts of protection. These instruments therefore address both heritage and cultural property.

They therefore include: The 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the 1992 Memory of the World Programme, the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, as well as the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, known as The Hague Convention, and the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, followed by the Unidroit Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects in 1995.

The purpose of this short brochure is to place the *Memory of the World* Programme in the context of UNESCO heritage protection, as of November 2012.

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3- Particularity of the Memory of the World Programme's three-level structure

# I – Titles and purposes of Conventions and heritage protection programmes

The titles of the Conventions generally explain quite clearly the nature of the property and heritage in question.

The **last two Conventions** – which are first in chronological order – **known as The Hague[1] Convention (1954)** and the **1970[2] Convention** - as their full name indicates – deal with the protection, in certain situations and contexts - of *cultural property*, covering

"Movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people, such as monuments of architecture, art or history, whether religious or secular; archaeological sites; groups of buildings which, as a whole, are of historical or artistic interest; works of art; manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest; as well as scientific collections and important collections of books or archives or of reproductions of the property defined above" (*1954 Convention*, Article 1)

"Property which, on religious or secular grounds, is specifically designated by each State as being of importance for archaeology, prehistory, history, literature, art or science and which belongs to the following categories:

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[1] http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0008/000824/082464mb.pdf
[2] http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001140/114046e.pdf?bcsi_scan_76859af71b923077

(a) Rare collections and specimens of fauna, flora, minerals and anatomy, and objects of palaeontological interest;

(b) property relating to history, including the history of science and technology and military and social history, to the life of national leaders, thinkers, scientists and artist and to events of national importance;

(c) products of archaeological excavations (including regular and clandestine) or of archaeological discoveries;

(d) elements of artistic or historical monuments or archaeological sites which have been dismembered;

(e) antiquities more than one hundred years old, such as inscriptions, coins and engraved seals;

(f) objects of ethnological interest;

(g) property of artistic interest, such as:

    (i) pictures, paintings and drawings produced entirely by hand on any support and in any material (excluding industrial designs and manufactured articles decorated by hand);

    (ii) original works of statuary art and sculpture in any material;

    (iii) original engravings, prints and lithographs;

    (iv) original artistic assemblages and montages in any material;

(h) rare manuscripts and incunabula, old books, documents and publications of special interest (historical, artistic, scientific, literary, etc.) singly or in collections;

(i) postage, revenue and similar stamps, singly or in collections;

(j) archives, including sound, photographic and cinematographic archives;

(k) articles of furniture more than one hundred years old and old musical instruments. (*1970 Convention, Article 1*)

**The 1972 Convention[3] defines "cultural heritage" as:**

"Monuments: architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science,
- Groups of buildings: groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;
- Sites: works of man or the combined works of nature and of man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological points of view."

And "natural heritage" as:
"Natural features consisting of physical and biological formations or groups of such formations, which are of outstanding universal value from the aesthetic or scientific point of view;
- Geological and physiographical formations and precisely delineated areas which constitute the habitat of threatened species of animals and plants of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation;
- Natural sites or precisely delineated natural areas of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science, conservation or natural beauty."

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[3] http://whc.unesco.org/archive/convention-en.pdf

**The 2001 Convention[4]** defines underwater cultural heritage as follows:

"All traces of human existence having a cultural, historical or archaeological character which have been partially or totally under water, periodically or continuously, for at least 100 years such as:

(i) sites, structures, buildings, artefacts and human remains, together with their archaeological and natural context;

(ii) vessels, aircraft, other vehicles or any part thereof, their cargo or other contents, together with their archaeological and natural context; and

(iii) objects of prehistoric character."

**The 2003 Convention[5]** defines "intangible cultural heritage" as:

"The practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.

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4 http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/underwater-cultural-heritage/2001-convention/official-text/
5 http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001325/132540e.pdf

The "intangible cultural heritage", as defined in paragraph 1 above, is manifested inter alia in the following domains:

(a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
(b) performing arts;
(c) social practices, rituals and festive events;
(d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
(e) traditional craftsmanship."

Finally, we can observe that in addition to the protection and promotion of the diversity of modes of artistic creation, protection, dissemination, distribution and enjoyment of the diversity of cultural expressions, the **2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions[6]** includes a "heritage component" in that the Convention applies to the conditions that make the expression, enrichment and transmission of cultural heritage possible.

**The "Memory of the World Programme"** does not offer exactly the same transparency as regards its purpose, which perhaps explains why it is sometimes seen as being broader than it actually is and why the distinctions between it and intangible cultural heritage are sometimes blurred.

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[6] http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001429/142919e.pdf

The scope of the *Memory of the World Programme* is strictly "documentary heritage", with all formats included: papyrus, parchment, paper, vinyl, IT programmes, etc. and the exact definition of "document" as understood by the Programme is the following: "A document is an item that is made up of signs or codes (such as writing) or sounds and/or images (such as a recording, photograph or film), and is (usually) moveable, preservable, and able to be reproduced or copied."

The Programme aims to prevent the loss and accidental or intentional distortion of these items, whether they affect their existence or integrity. The aim is also to draw the attention of the governments and populations to the fragility, vulnerability and importance of this heritage. And the programme's title is not without significance and its urgency is justified as there are sometimes alarming cases of cultural amnesia and the worrying observation of a break in the chain which expresses interest for this heritage.

It should also be noted that this Programme comes under UNESCO's Communication/Information sector. And in addition to the protection aim is that of accessibility and if possible, universal accessibility.

While the protection of original formats was at one time at the forefront of the Programme's concerns, the accessibility of the content via digitized versions and the growth of the digital format seems to be a bigger issue in current debates, as was seen in the most recent Conference organized in Vancouver on the preservation of digital heritage[7]. For several years, the protection concern has also extended to documents generated in a single digital format, which the renewal of technologies is threatening with illegibility and/or inaccessibility.

[7] http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/events/calendar-of-events/events-websites/the-memory-of-the-world-in-the-digital-age-digitization-and-preservation/

# II - Conventions vs programme: statutes, governing bodies and obligations

If the *Memory of the World* Programme needed to be brought closer to existing conventions, this could easily be done with those of 1972 and 2003: the same concerns over protection and promotion, and the same listing system.

 Nevertheless, the *Memory of the World* remains a programme and not a convention, which results in several differences.

## 1- Convention ratified by a State vs specialists' programme

Firstly, we can recall that a Convention is ratified by a State and that to that extent it is the States which make the commitments, which they then must meet in relation to the community of other States Parties. This is not the case with regard to *Memory of the World*, which is a programme of experts and specialists based solely on the goodwill and sometimes volunteer work of its participants. No ratification is necessary to partake in this programme: participation is only based on the free commitment of governments, professionals, institutions and civil society in general to support the Programme's objectives.

## 2- Member States' representative bodies in collaboration with advisory bodies vs specialists with no mention of nationality

The implementation of Conventions also means the setting up of governing bodies within UNESCO: the General Assembly of States Parties and the Intergovernmental Committee, the latter being authorized to examine applicants seeking inclusion on the various lists.

Meanwhile, the *Memory of the World* programme has an International Advisory Committee which evaluates the requests for inclusion on the international register, a Register Subcommittee and a Marketing Subcommittee, which are all made up of named specialists and technicians.

## 3- Reports to the community of Member States vs the absence of periodic reports

The ratification of the Convention by a State also leads to a series of obligations with which it must comply to effectively ensure the protection and conservation of the sites set out in the 1972 Convention, the safeguarding, development and promotion of intangible cultural heritage for the 2003 Convention, which has an impact on the management of the registered sites and items, as well as on the relevant financing.

Due to its voluntary nature, participation in the *Memory of the World* programme involves no binding obligations nor formal periodic report on the implementation and management of the registered properties, as is the case for the 1972 and 2003 Conventions, even though it is expected and understood that the inclusion of a document or collection of documents on the international register should at the very least be accompanied by management which is faithful to the Programme's objectives.

The only follow-up of the Programme's implementation is carried out by the national committees which report their activities to the Secretariat and various committees.

## 4 Established vs informal international assistance system

Finally, while under the 1972 and 2003 Conventions there is provision for UNESCO to provide financial assistance or capacity-building via specially established funds dedicated to the implementation of said Conventions, this system is rare under the *Memory of the World* programme. No fund operates like UNESCO to which States would contribute as in the case of world heritage, specifically dedicated to international assistance for the Programme's implementation. Most resources come from the establishment of systems for which the Programme's Marketing Subcommittee puts forward proposals.

## III – Implementing the Memory of the World Programme and interactions

## 1 – Key texts, Programmes, Conventions and activities to guide and/or accompany the implementation of the Memory of the World Programme

►As for the two Conventions of 1972 and 2003, the implementation of the *Memory of the World* programme is widely defined by the *General Guidelines to Safeguard Documentary Heritage*,[10] similarly to the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*[11] and the *Operational Directives for the implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage*.[12] The text recalls the aims and suppositions of the programme, its key texts, architecture, functioning and procedures.

►Based on the implementation of the various roles the programme set for itself, a certain number of technical texts have been produced which have or can temporarily fill a breach in the handling of this heritage, or support its professionalization. These include:

- *Guidelines for the Preservation of Digital Heritage.*[13]

- *A Guide to Standards, Recommended Practices and Reference Literature Related to the Preservation of Documents of All Kinds*[14] by George Boston, 1998.

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[10] http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001256/125637e.pdf
[11] http://whc.unesco.org/archive/opguide12-en.pdf
[12] http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00026
[13] http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001300/130071e.pdf
[14] http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001126/112676eo.pdf

*- Risks associated with the use of recordable CDs and DVDs as reliable storage media in archival collections: strategies and alternatives*[15] by Kevin Bradley.

*- Guidelines for E-reference Library Services for Distance Learners and other remote users*[16] by Ian M. Johnson, Dr. Peter H. Reid and Dr. Robert Newton, 20 May 2011.

*- The IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines*[17] by Richard Ebdon and Sarah Gould, 2002.

►In addition to good use of these practical guides, it should be recalled that the **Memory of the World** programme is implemented in the framework of other instruments, activities and conventions, particularly in the Culture sector, including but not limited to UNESCO:

- Documentary heritage – as we saw from the outset – taken into consideration in the two Conventions of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and of 1970 on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, the implementation of which, supported by increasing numbers of national ratifications, should avoid abusive dismemberment or intentional destruction of entire documentary heritage collections.

- Moreover, the preservation of this heritage is theoretically covered by the – chronological – implementation of several guideline texts (less binding than Conventions), Conventions and projects:

- *Recommendation for the Safeguarding and Preservation of Moving Images*[18] – 1980

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[15] http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001477/147782e.pdf
[16] http://www.unesco. org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/guidelines_ereference_library_services _distance_learners_en.pdf
[17] http://archive.ifla.org/VII/s11/pubs/sguide02.pdf
[18] http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-

- *Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore*[19] – 1989

- The Blue Shield programme's activities, designed for the cultural heritage threatened by natural and man-made disasters – 1996

- *Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage*[20] – 2003

- In several respects, the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*[21] – 2005

- The creation of the World Digital Library,[22] launched by UNESCO and the Library of Congress in Washington – 2007.


►Alongside these UNESCO-specific instruments, it must be noted that the objectives of the **Memory of the World** programme are pursued and often achieved by numerous other initiatives which are affiliated with neither UNESCO nor the programme and which are essentially efforts made by the following, amongst others:

- Major national conservation establishments and major public and private documentary heritage distribution groups

- National and/or regional policies supporting preservation and distribution of documentary heritage

- Technical and scientific cooperations in areas such as digitization/cataloguing training, curating, archiving or library and information science (LIS).

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URL_ID=13139&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
[19] http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-
URL_ID=13141&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
[20] http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-
URL_ID=17721&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
[21] http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-
URL_ID=31038&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
[22] http://www.wdl.org/en/

What does, however, remain unquestionably specific to UNESCO is the representative list instrument (of World Heritage, Intangible Cultural Heritage, etc.) and more precisely concerning the **Memory of the World** programme, the *Memory of the World Register*.

## 2 – "Lists"

<u>Procedure for admission to the **Memory of the World Register**</u>

Every two years, a call for applications is launched to invite institutions, States and individuals to propose documents or collections of documents they consider to have had a major influence or to be representative of a particular time in History, for admission to the Register.

Theoretically, and as it is not a Convention, applications are not submitted by States Parties but rather by "whoever wants", except that it is National Committees that are invited to coordinate and submit applications. Up to two national applications per biennium are allowed, with no number limit for multinational applications, if collections to add to the list have been, for example, spread over history through institutions situated in distinct territories.

The International Advisory Committee then reviews applications and makes additional queries if necessary.

If the application is accepted, a reference to the document is added to the Register of the **Memory of the World** on the UNESCO website and the institution may use this inclusion as a source for its communication, perhaps using the logo created for the programme, with the restrictions laid down by the regulatory texts. The registered documents should also figure on the site of the World Digital Library and become driving elements in promoting documentary heritage in general.

<u>Selection criteria:</u>

Inclusion on the Register is possible under condition of compliance with several criteria, based on the criteria for addition to the World

Heritage list and also on the criteria which applied – until the 2003 Convention – to the proclamation of the masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage of Humanity.

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Criteria for Selection for the World Heritage List

"- Represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;

- exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;

- bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;

- be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;

- be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use or sea-use which is representative or a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change:

- be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);

And

- meet the test of authenticity in design, material [and] workmanship […];

- have adequate legal, contractual and/or traditional protection and management mechanisms to ensure the conservation of the nominated cultural properties or cultural landscapes…"[23]

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[23] *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*

The Proclamation of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity required that submitted expressions or cultural spaces:

"- demonstrate their outstanding value as masterpiece of the human creative genius;

- give wide evidence of their roots in the cultural tradition or cultural history of the community concerned;

- be a means of affirming the cultural identity of the cultural communities concerned;

- provide proof of excellence in the application of the skill and technical qualities displayed;

- affirm their value as unique testimony of living cultural traditions;

- be at risk of degradation or of disappearing."[24]

Furthermore, these cultural forms and spaces were to be in conformity with UNESCO ideals and in particular with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The files proposing candidates for Proclamation also had to provide proof of the full involvement and agreement of the communities concerned, and to include an action plan for the safeguarding or promotion of the cultural spaces or expressions, which should have been elaborated in close collaboration with the tradition "bearers".

Inclusion on the Register of the Memory of the World requires the following conditions to be met:

- **Authenticity** of the documentary heritage, its identity and its origin.

- **World significance** of this documentary heritage. It must be unique and irreplaceable, something whose loss would constitute an impoverishment of the heritage of humanity. It must have

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[24] http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00103

created great impact over a span of time and/or within a particular cultural area of the world. It must have had great influence – whether positive or negative – on the course of history.

- The documentary heritage in question must meet at least two of the following **comparative criteria**:

**1 Time:** Some documents are especially evocative of their time, which may have been one of crisis, or significant social or cultural change. A document may represent new discovery or be the "first of its kind".

**2 Place:** The document may contain crucial information about a locality important in world history and culture; or the location may itself have been an important influence on the events or phenomena represented by the document. It may be descriptive of physical environments, cities or institutions since vanished.

**3 People:** The social and cultural context of its creation may reflect significant aspects of human behaviour, or of social, industrial, artistic or political development. It may capture the essence of great movements, transitions, advances or regression. It may reflect the impact of key individuals or groups in these fields.

**4 Subject and theme:** The subject matter may represent particular historical or intellectual developments in natural, social and human sciences, politics, ideology, sports and the arts.

**5 Form and style:** The item may have outstanding aesthetic, stylistic or linguistic value, be a typical or key exemplar of a type of presentation or custom, or of a disappeared or disappearing carrier or format.

In 2007, this set of five criteria grew – probably influenced by the 2003 Convention – with a sixth criterion taking into consideration the value accorded by communities. The exact heading is:

> **6   Social/spiritual/community significance:**
> Application of this criterion must reflect living significance – does the documentary heritage have an emotional hold on people who are alive today? Is it venerated as holy or for its mystical qualities, or reverenced for its association with significant people and events? (Once those who have revered the documentary heritage for its social/ spiritual/ community significance no longer do so, or are no longer living, it loses this specific significance and may eventually acquire historical significance).

## 3 – Particularity of the structure of the Memory of the World programme

However, contrary to heritage conventions and in addition to this **international Register**, the programme has also provided for its implementation at different scales: in addition to the international Register, it is possible for national committees to establish a **national register**, and certain regions have created regional committees and a **regional register** in cases where the stakes of the documents examined had a national or regional scope.[25]

This three-level implementation architecture is unique in the UNESCO system. It enables different ownerships of programme objectives in the various countries and regions, complying with

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[25] On the different national implementations of the programme, the results of the survey conducted by the Latvian national Commission are of interest:
http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/latvian_survey_results_on_national_registers_en.pdf or the PowerPoint version of this document:
http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/latvian_survey_results_presentation_en.pdf.

the *General Guidelines to Safeguard Documentary Heritage*[26], and fuels the diversity of listed heritage.

***The Register Companion***[27] states that:

"The inscriptions in each register are based on essentially the same criteria, adapted to the cultural setting in which it belongs. Each register is separately administered by the relevant international, regional or national MoW committee. The fundamental difference among the registers is the extent of geographic influence of the documentary heritage that they include."

Their existence is justified firstly by the fact that "the world's documentary heritage is so vast and complex that a single register would be unwieldy and unworkable" and secondly by the idea that the creation of "geographically-based registers [allows] appropriate regional and national expertise and local resources to be applied" to certain projects."

The joint visibility of the three levels of registers – ensured by posting on certain commission and/or national/regional committee websites – would ideally represent the cultural diversity which characterizes this heritage.

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[26] http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001256/125637e.pdf
[27] http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/Register%20Companion.pdf

# IV - Memory of the World programme news

## Status of the programme: Extract from the Decisions adopted by the UNESCO Executive Board at its 190th session (3-18 October 2012)

**"Item 16: Report by the Director-General on the experts meeting on strengthening the Memory of the World Programme** (190 EX/16[28]; 190 EX/55[29])

The Executive Board,

1. Having examined document 190 EX/16,

2. Noting the importance of preserving and strengthening of communication and information programmes at UNESCO, which inter alia is carrying out an important global initiative to preserve and ensure access to the documentary heritage of humanity,

3. Emphasizing the importance of synergy of the Memory of the World and Information for All Programmes in preserving documentary heritage, including digital heritage, of humanity,

4. Thanks the government of Poland for hosting the expert meeting in Warsaw from 8 to 10 May 2012, and noting with satisfaction that the meeting was attended by 50 experts from all regions;

5. Takes note of the recommendations of the aforementioned expert meeting;

6. Requests the Director-General to elaborate a draft action plan which includes a time-frame and financial implications for strengthening the Memory of the World Programme based on 36 C/Resolution 59 and the recommendations formulated by the expert meeting in Warsaw, and to submit this draft action plan to the Executive Board at its 191st session for its consideration;

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[28] http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002171/217156f.pdf (Report by the Director-General on the Experts' Meeting on Strengthening the Memory of the World Programme, submitted to the 190th session of the UNESCO Executive Board).
[29] http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002180/218078f.pdf (Recommended draft decisions).

7. Recommends that the Director-General make greater efforts to strengthen policies and capacities for archives, museums, libraries and other institutions that house such heritage;

8. Also requests the Director-General to undertake a preliminary study of the technical, financial and legal aspects on the desirability of a standard-setting instrument on preservation and access to documentary heritage for examination by the Executive Board at its 191st session."[30]

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[30] http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002181/218189e.pdf; Decisions adopted by the Executive Board at its 190th session.

Secretariat of the French Memory of the World Committee
French National Commission for UNESCO
57, boulevard des Invalides
75007 Paris
France

+33 (0)1 53 69 38 38
anne-sabine.sabater@diplomatie.gouv.fr