



**UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION**

**Ceremony commemorating the inscription of
League of Nations Archives 1919-1946
on the Memory of the World Register**

Mr Abdul Waheed Khan
Assistant Director-General, Communication and Information Sector

Geneva, Switzerland
28 April 2010

The Director-General, who to her regret could not attend this ceremony in person, has asked me to extend her best wishes to all of you here. She is nevertheless delighted with the decision to organize a ceremony celebrating the inscription of the Archives of the League of Nations (1919-1946) on the Memory of the World Register.

This event is an excellent opportunity to illustrate the urgent need to preserve our documentary heritage and to provide the greatest possible access to it through both traditional and new information technologies.

Today, we celebrate the inscription on the Memory of the World Register of the unique League of Nations Archives which are outstanding examples of documentary heritage of universal value whose protection as a whole is the principal aim of the Memory of the World Programme. The International Advisory Committee for the Memory of the World Programme recommended the inscription of these documents at its ninth meeting held in Bridgetown, Barbados from 29 to 31 July 2009.

This distinguished assembly is well aware of the unique quality of the documents inscribed and I shall simply recall the pioneering work the League of Nations undertook in building international peace and cooperation. Its invaluable contribution to the institutionalization of international collaboration cannot be disputed as is attested to by the many researchers and scholars who consult the archives to this day.

While we are pleased that the United Nations Office at Geneva is fully attuned to the worth of these archives, many countries sadly still seem unaware of the role which memory plays in nourishing each and every culture. Others refuse access to their organized or disorganized memory, which means that large pieces of the jigsaw are missing. Conflict and strife have led to the deliberate or accidental destruction of libraries and archives, thereby breaking our ties with the past and blurring our understanding of the present. History shows that those who neglect the past do not have a future. On behalf of humanity, UNESCO has taken on the enormous task of remedying this situation by eliminating or at the least reducing risks to documentary heritage. The challenge is immense and although UNESCO, NGOs and many other national, international and private organizations are already playing a vital part, additional resources are a crucial factor, if we are to do more than scratch the surface of the problem.

UNESCO is uniquely well placed to promote the preservation of mankind heritage at the international level. The state of the world's cultural monuments and sites is well recorded through the work of UNESCO's World Heritage Centre. At the same time, the state of our documentary heritage is largely unknown. It may be that the Memory of the World Register will one day play the same role as that of the World Heritage list, capturing the international imagination, highlighting the importance of the Memory of the World and improving fund-raising.

Where audiovisual and digital archives are concerned, the Programme is one of the most important UNESCO has ever launched. While grave problems face printed and written documents, modern carriers and documents are far more endangered on a large scale than conventional carriers. This is a

widespread international phenomenon of which neither scholars, policy makers or the public are generally aware.

The Memory of the World Programme has been widely welcomed in the developing world and in countries whose documentary heritage might be thought most at risk. It is clear that the Programme is opening up new possibilities for education and research while drawing wider attention to the importance of preserving and disseminating the documentary heritage.

As far as funding the Programme is concerned, UNESCO cannot possibly finance this initiative from its own resources. Core funding will of course continue to be available to serve as pump-priming for publicity and the quest for extra-budgetary resources. Under these circumstances, we must ensure that all heritage bodies are made more aware of the need to put their own resources into the protection of their documentary heritage.

Not enough has been done to promote the programme and today's event is a good opportunity do so.

I thank your for your attention.