



## Regional Training Emergency Response for Documentary Heritage Course Announcement

### WHEN

Course dates: 30 November – 4 December 2026

Arrival: 29 November

Departure: 5 December

### WHERE

Colombo, Sri Lanka

### INTRODUCTION

Across South and South-East Asia, written documentary heritage faces increasing threats from disasters, conflict, and chronic underfunding. The region is home to a rich variety of materials, from palm leaf manuscripts to stone inscriptions, each carrying knowledge essential to understanding the present and shaping a more resilient future. Yet, despite their value, many collections remain highly vulnerable. Recurring flood events are among the most persistent and destructive risks. Seasonal monsoons, increasingly intensified by climate change, affect countries across South and South-East Asia. Floodwaters damage storage facilities, accelerate mould growth, and cause irreversible loss of fragile materials, particularly in institutions with limited environmental controls.

In response to this growing crisis, the [Collective for Historical Dialogue and Memory \(CHDM\)](#), in partnership with [Cultural Emergency Response \(CER\)](#), with generous support from the [Whiting Foundation](#) and in collaboration with the [Sri Lanka National Archives](#), the IFLA Preservation and Conservation (PAC) Centre hosted at the [National Library of Sri Lanka](#), the [International Council on Archives \(ICA\)](#), the British Library's [Endangered Archives Programme \(EAP\)](#) in collaboration with the EAP South Asia Hub hosted at the School of Cultural Texts and Records at Jadavpur University and the and the [Digital Repository of Endangered Manuscripts in Southeast Asia \(DREAMSEA\)](#), is launching the fourth edition of the Regional Course '*Emergency Response for Documentary Heritage*'.

Regional assessments by UNESCO and partner organisations highlight the scale of the challenge. Many documentary heritage institutions operate in high-risk environments, yet a significant proportion lack disaster preparedness plans and trained staff. Capacity gaps are especially pronounced in preventive conservation, emergency response, and digital preservation. These challenges are even more acute for community-held and privately managed collections, which often operate with limited resources and infrastructure.

This programme directly addresses these gaps. It equips documentary heritage stewards from high-risk areas with both theoretical knowledge and hands-on skills in risk mitigation, emergency response, and recovery, with a focus on written documentary heritage. Participants will take part in collaborative exercises, planning simulations, and peer exchange to develop practical, sustainable strategies.

### MAIN TRAINING THEMES

The course will focus on strengthening practical skills and knowledge to preserve documentary heritage collection in crisis. The training will mainly focus on the following themes:

- Risk analysis and mitigation strategies for documentary heritage

- Planning for the prevention, care and rescue of documentary heritage in crisis, through emergency preparedness and response plans
- Emergency actions for the protection of damaged documentary heritage in crisis: evacuation, triage and stabilisation
- Resource mobilisation and project management for documentary heritage preservation projects
- Carrying out digitisation with limited resources.

## CLOSING CONFERENCE

The training course ends with a Closing Conference on 4 December, bringing together regional, national and international documentary heritage preservation institutions, experts and funding organisations, to discuss the main challenges and best practices to ensure the preservation of endangered documentary heritage.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of the training, participants will be able to:

- Explore the diversity, values and risks associated with documentary heritage in the region
- Assess and manage risks to documentary heritage, in particular risks related to pests (such as insects and microorganisms) and environmental conditions
- Take preventive actions that reduce disaster risks
- Develop an emergency plan for their collections
- Secure, salvage and stabilise a variety of documentary heritage materials in time of crisis, in particular measures relevant to flood-related emergencies, including basic drying, cleaning, and stabilisation of affected materials
- Understand the importance and the steps to undertake to strengthen the collaboration between the crisis and heritage sector in their own context
- Engage with the options available for resource mobilisation and different approaches to involving partners and funders
- Understand the main challenges regarding the digital preservation of collection
- Create teams for safeguarding documentary heritage in crisis

## WHAT TO EXPECT

- Pre-course homework before the in-person training
- The training course will take place from Monday to Thursday
- On Friday a closing conference will be held followed by a closing dinner.
- Daily lunches and coffee breaks will be provided for between sessions.
- There is a course orientation on Sunday afternoon before the course begins. You will meet the rest of the participants and the course organisers and learn more about the week to come.

## APPLICATION

We are looking for:

- Archival and library professionals from across South and Southeast Asia, including Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Maldives, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Laos
- Archival and library professionals working in risk-prone areas
- Archival and library professionals with direct responsibility for collections care

In order to apply, please fill in the online application form: [here](#).

If you are an ICA Member, please apply through [this link](#).

The deadline for application is 16 June.



## WORKING LANGUAGE

English

## COURSE FEE

Accommodation, meals, travel and visa expenses will be provided by course organisers.

## TRANSPORTATION

Pick up service at the airport by the guide and transfer to the hotel, Transfer from the hotel to the workshop hall where the workshop is held daily in the morning and transfer from the hall to the hotel on the return trip.

**Formal communication with the Organising Committee will be via the email addresses indicated in the communication channels.**

## ORGANISATIONS

### [Collective for Historical Dialogue and Memory \(CHDM\)](#)

The Collective for Historical Dialogue & Memory (CHDM) was established in March 2022 as an independent, non-partisan and not-for-profit organisation. CHDM fulfils a specialist role in working with Sri Lanka's complex pasts through processes that support reconciliation, strengthen accountability, promote understanding and prevent the recurrence of conflict. The organisation creates knowledge and learning pathways through the areas of history education, critical approach to museum practice as well as archives and records management. CHDM aims to document and preserve, neglected and marginalized histories, promote history education and access, and foster critical dialogue through collaborative, rights-based approaches.

### [Cultural Emergency Response \(CER\)](#)

CER coordinates and supports locally-led protection of heritage under threat. CER promotes inclusivity and accessibility by developing and strengthening decentralised infrastructures for cultural emergency response. Through its emergency grant mechanism, CER provides fast, flexible support to fit the needs of local actors in crisis situations and invest in the capacities of their partners through dialogue, training, and sharing expertise.

### [The Whiting Foundation](#)

The Whiting Foundation provides targeted support for writers, scholars, and the stewards of humanity's shared cultural heritage. The Whiting Foundation supports writing through the Whiting Award for emerging writers, Creative Nonfiction Grant, and Literary Magazine Prizes and offers Public Engagement Fellowship and Seed Grant for scholars. Moreover, Whiting supports the preservation and dissemination of endangered heritage around the world. This training initiative is part of the ongoing collaboration between CER and the Whiting Foundation, focused on providing first aid to documentary heritage of exceptional value to global, regional, or local communities that is under imminent threat from conflicts or disasters.

### [Sri Lanka National Archives](#)

The Sri Lanka National Archives (SLNA) is responsible for the selection and transfer of public records into its custody, which includes the listing and classification of public records, and ensuring the preservation and accessibility of public archives and public records, amongst many other functions. The National Archives is the apex institution for archives and records management in the country and plays a vital role in ensuring that the evidence of actions and decisions within the state and government is safeguarded. The Sri Lanka National Archives holds a wide range of archives, including colonial-era manuscripts, maps, photographs, official correspondence and private



archives. The institution plays a key role in supporting research, protecting documentary heritage, and ensuring public access to information. By preserving and providing access to these archives, it contributes to a deeper understanding of Sri Lanka's history and institutional memory.

### [National Library of Sri Lanka](#)

The National Library of Sri Lanka is the country's research and reference library, serving as the central hub for collecting, preserving, and providing access to Sri Lanka's published and documentary heritage. Managed by the National Library and Documentation Services Board, it holds extensive collections of books, manuscripts, and government publications, and plays a key role in legal deposit, national bibliography, and library development across the country. The library also hosts the [IFLA Preservation and Conservation \(PAC\) Centre](#) for tropical climates and pest control, established in 2015 by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. In this role, it acts as a regional centre of expertise on the preservation of library and archival materials, particularly in challenging climatic conditions. The centre provides training, advisory services, and research on conservation practices, while supporting international collaboration and contributing to initiatives such as UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme.

### [International Council on Archives](#)

The International Council on Archives (ICA) is an international non-governmental organisation dedicated to promote the efficient and effective management and use of records, archives and data in all formats and its preservation as the cultural and evidentiary heritage of humanity, through international cooperation. It was set up in 1948, and membership is open to national and international organisations, professional groups and individuals. In 2024, it grouped together about 2,470 members in nearly 150 countries and territories. ICA has close partnership links with UNESCO, and is a founding member of the Blue Shield, which works to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by wars and natural disasters.

### [The British Library's Endangered Archives Programme](#)

The Endangered Archives Programme (EAP), run by the British Library, facilitates the digitisation of archives around the world that are in danger of destruction, neglect or physical deterioration. Thanks to generous funding from Arcadia, a charitable foundation that works to preserve cultural heritage and promote open access to knowledge, EAP has provided grants to almost 500 projects in over ninety countries worldwide, in more than a hundred languages and scripts. Since 2004, the Programme has helped digitise more than fifteen million images and 35,000 sound tracks. Archive types digitised so far include rare printed sources, manuscripts, visual materials, audio recordings. This continually expanding online collection is available freely through local archival partners, and the EAP website ([eap.bl.uk](http://eap.bl.uk)). In support of these efforts and to strengthen regional engagement, the British Library has designated the School of Cultural Texts and Records at Jadavpur University, Kolkata as the EAP South Asia Hub, a collaborative initiative designed to facilitate outreach, build capacity, and to support endangered archive initiatives across South Asia in alignment with EAP's preservation goals.

### [Digital Repository of Endangered Manuscripts in Southeast Asia \(DREAMSEA\)](#)

The DREAMSEA program to preserve manuscripts in Southeast Asia is executed by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) of the State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta and the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC), Hamburg University. The program is supported by a grant from the Arcadia Foundation, a funding agency established by Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin in England of which the main mission is to preserve cultural heritage and the environment, and to promote open access to the entire world.