

Implementing United Nations Security Council Resolution 2347

The Critical Role of Digital Libraries

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المكتبة الرقمية في الشرق الأوسط

DIGITAL LIBRARY OF THE MIDDLE EAST

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The Critical Role of Digital Libraries

The historic passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2347 marked a critical step forward in the effort to encourage a unified response from UN Member States to the crisis of cultural heritage destruction. The proposal from the Italian and French Permanent Missions unanimously passed the Security Council, a significant indication of its importance and the support it engendered among Member States. Under the rubric of “Maintenance of international peace and security,” it outlines precedents and advocates specific steps for Member States to take to combat looting, the illicit trade in cultural material, and terrorism.

Article 17 of the UNSC Resolution 2347 is particularly important. This article provides guidance on strategy and suggests preventative steps that Member States can take to strengthen its system of protections. These include adopting import and export regulations, establishing dedicated law enforcement units for cultural heritage protection, engaging the art market and industry, and creating educational programs, among other initiatives.

It is section (a) of Article 17 that concerns us here. It:

17. Calls upon Member States, in order to prevent and counter trafficking of cultural property illegally appropriated and exported in the context of armed conflicts, notably by terrorist groups, to consider adopting the following measures, in relation to such cultural property: (a) Introducing or improving cultural heritage’s and properties’ local and national inventory lists, including through digitalized information when possible, and making them easily accessible to relevant authorities and agencies, as appropriate

This critical first suggestion, to inventory and digitize property lists and make them readily accessible, is an area where the UN policy is already succeeding. Digital libraries around the world are actively implementing inventory, digitization, and accessibility projects at a prodigious rate. In many instances they are models of multilateral international cooperation and public-private partnership and they are occurring in a vast group of Member States. We would suggest that digital libraries represent one of the areas in which unified cultural heritage preservation policy is most actively taking hold and combatting the forces of criminality and terrorism who would destroy or illicitly traffic our shared cultural heritage.

How do digital libraries help safeguard cultural heritage?

At its most elementary, a digital library is a collection of digital works.¹ Digital libraries can include bibliographical and archival records, the types of collections we

¹ The Digital Library Federation defines digital libraries as, “organizations that provide the resources, including the specialized staff, to select, structure, offer intellectual access to, interpret, distribute, preserve the integrity of, and ensure the persistence over time of collections of digital works so that they are readily and economically available for use by a defined community or set of communities.”

associate with brick and mortar libraries. But many include much more, including records from museums, archaeological sites, of other material objects, as well as records that document intangible cultural heritage. These records are made available through an online platform.

UNSC Resolution 2347 advocates the vital role that these types of collections play for prevention of trafficking of cultural heritage materials. Inventories allow museum and library directors to know exactly what they have in case of catastrophic loss. Digitization and web publication make records broadly available, including to law enforcement agencies around the world. Cataloguing and description provides provenance information to the commercial market. Photographic and 3D documentation allow for identification of objects that have disappeared due to looting and illicit trafficking. And internet accessibility offers users around the world the chance to engage with and learn from these records.

Creating inventories, documenting collections, and making digital records accessible are considered best practice for heritage collections and are widely used around the world. There are many individual inventory, digitization, and access projects that contribute directly to UN policy implementation. For the sake of this paper, we are considering just a few examples of larger collections of materials that contain contributions from multiple countries, reflecting the UN interest in international cooperation. These collections include records from varied sources federated into digital platforms that provide search capability. They are often associated with regional efforts and collections come from multiple UN Member States. They stand as examples of how digital libraries are implementing UNSC 2347 on a significant scale and how digital libraries are taking the lead in fostering the related goal of international understanding and access to our shared history.

“Resolution 2347 recognizes the ongoing and enduring value of traditional library, archival, and museum skills and expertise in the digital age, and offers a call to expand this work.”

Dr. Laurie N. Taylor, Digital Scholarship Director, dLOC

Examples of Multinational Digital Libraries

The Digital Library of the Caribbean

Founded in 2004, the [Digital Library of the Caribbean](#) (dLOC) was established to develop a collection of digital archives, artifacts, and library materials that provides users with access to Caribbean culture, historical and research materials held in archives, libraries, and private collections. dLOC comprises collections that speak to the similarities and differences in histories, cultures, languages and governmental systems.

Its mission statement refers specifically to the dLOC’s commitment to preservation.

The Digital Library of the Caribbean’s diverse partners/members serve an international community of scholars, students, and citizens by working

together to preserve and to provide enhanced electronic access to cultural, historical, legal, governmental, and research materials in a common web space with a multilingual interface.

The Digital Library of the Caribbean has a wide, international membership. This network of coordinated collections is actively implementing the UN cultural heritage preservation goals, federating collections in multiple UN member states including:

- Aruba
- Bahamas
- Barbados
- Belize
- Cuba
- Curaçao
- Dominican Republic
- Great Britain
- Guadeloupe (MANIOC)
- Guyana
- Haiti
- Jamaica
- Panama
- Puerto Rico
- Martinique (MANIOC)
- Mexico
- Netherlands
- Suriname
- Venezuela
- US
- US Virgin Islands



Digital Library of the Caribbean Member States

Dr. Laurie Taylor, dLOC's Digital Scholarship Director, reports that the goals of UNSC 2347 are integral to the Library. "dLOC partners work heavily with creating local and national inventories and sharing them whenever possible because this is foundational research material for building and sharing collections, digitally and otherwise, and for preservation and access overall." And those initiatives will continue to guide dLOC's future activities. "dLOC is always working with partners as well as other institutions and groups to develop inventories and bibliographies to help define the known universe of materials, and to then find ways to digitize materials for preservation and access."

An additional important accomplishment of the Digital Library of the Caribbean is their work in cultural heritage preservation related to the threat of natural disasters. Since this year's devastating hurricanes in the region, the dLOC is sharing its inventories records with regional partners to support the work of both brick and mortar and digital libraries as they response to that disaster. And after the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, the dLOC was used to coordinate post-disaster interventions at the National Library.

dLOC is administered by Florida International University in partnership with the University of the Virgin Islands and the University of Florida.

The Digital Library of the Middle East

The [Digital Library of the Middle East](#) (DLME) is a worldwide effort that seeks to federate collections of all types of cultural heritage material, from manuscripts and archives to archaeological and multimedia collections. Collaboration with partners across the Middle East and North Africa to reveal, share, and protect collections of cultural assets is a core principle.

The Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) and the Antiquities Coalition founded the DLME in 2016.² It was conceived specifically with the goals of UNSC 2347 in mind – to create access to globally significant collections of cultural material, to federate collections that are already inventoried and digitized, and to encourage and fund inventory and digitization

“In the last years, as we have seen the attacks by Daesh and other cultural racketeers, we thought about how we could organize a response that would mitigate these losses and create a resource for people around the world. And the outcome was the Digital Library of the Middle East.”

Dr. Charles Henry, Co-Principal Investigator, Digital Library of the Middle East

projects of hidden collections in the MENA region. Its website explains that cultural heritage preservation is at the core of its conception. The DLME creates:

... a digitally based, internationally shared inventory of cultural artifacts that includes detailed descriptions and images, and confirms objects' ownership and legal status. This information would help determine whether an item of cultural or historical significance offered for sale or being transferred was acquired legally. Images and brief descriptions from the DLME (are) made publicly available to encourage greater understanding of the region's cultural legacy and respect for the importance of the cultural commonwealth, while helping to safeguard a fundamentally important expression of our humanity.

DLME Co-Principal Investigator and CLIR President Chuck Henry outlines the DLME's commitment to UNSC 2347's principles.

² Peter Herdrich is Project Director of the DLME and the Co-Founder of the Antiquities Coalition is the author of this report.

In many ways, the DLME was conceived with the Section 17 goals in mind. We have participated in UN cultural heritage expert meetings for the last three years and are familiar with the work of UNESCO, UNODC, INTERPOL, and UNIDROIT on these issues. We are informed by the work of the Antiquities Coalition and its success in coordinating a regional response to issues of looting, the illicit trade, and terrorism finance. Another motivating factor is that CLIR hosts the Digital Library Federation, the most important organization of digital library practitioners. And in the last years, as we have seen the attacks by Daesh and other cultural racketeers, we thought about how we could organize a response that would mitigate these losses and create a resource for people around the world. And the outcome was the Digital Library of the Middle East.

Working with funders such as the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Whiting Foundation, and programming and library partners at the Stanford University Library and the Qatar National Library, the program takes a proactive role toward the access and security goals of inventories and digitization. The DLME is actively working on reducing risk and increasing exposure to MENA collections by funding inventory and digitization projects across the region. “We know that this is best practice,” explains Dr. Henry. “The challenge is finances. So, we believe it is our responsibility to fund these projects and work as advisors with collections of all kinds.”

The DLME is federating collections about the cultural heritage of the Middle East from all countries around the world. Member States, especially those from the MENA region, or collections interested in collaboration and funding opportunities can contact Peter Herdrich at pherdrich@theantiquitiescoalition.org.

The Digital Library of the Middle East is available in prototype at <https://spotlight.dlme.clir.org/library>. It is a private effort incubating at CLIR.

Endangered Archives Program

Located at the British Library and funded by the Arcadia Foundation, the [Endangered Archives Program](#) (EAP) actively works to promote scholarship and to intervene to protect at risk cultural heritage collections around the world. The EAP states the importance of preservation clearly. “Unless action is taken now, much of mankind’s documentary heritage may vanish - discarded as no longer of relevance or left to deteriorate beyond recovery.”

Their website defines their goals.

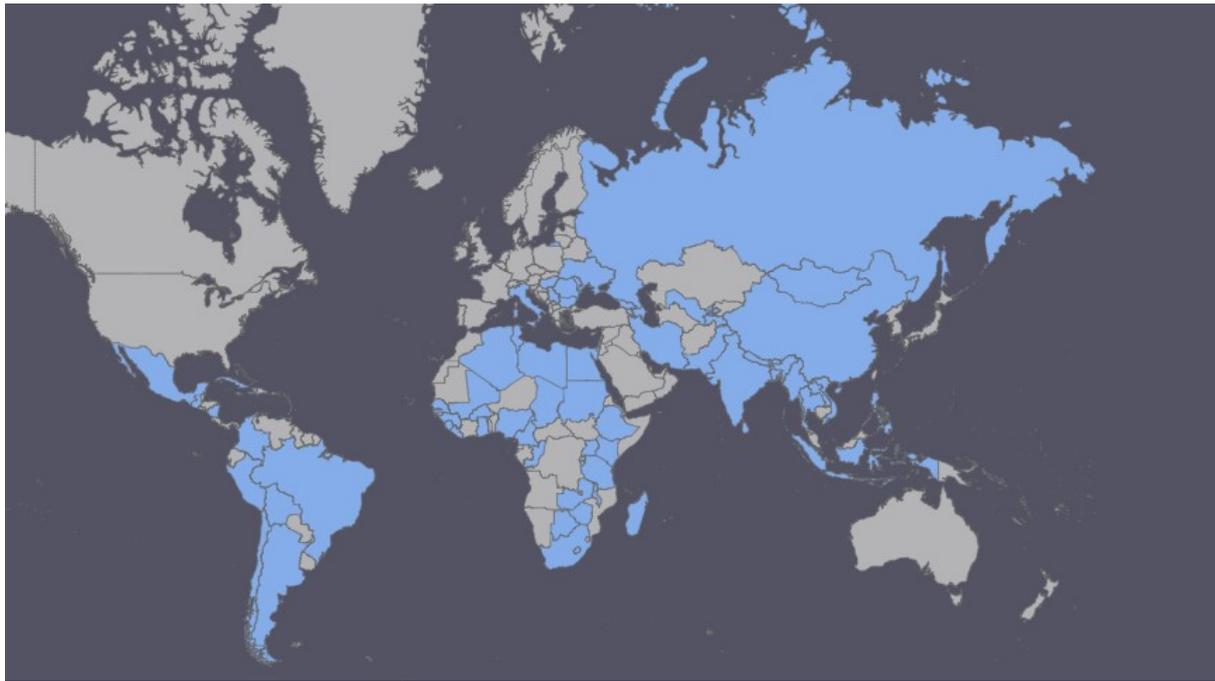
The Programme's aim is to contribute to the preservation of archival material that is in danger of destruction, neglect or physical deterioration worldwide. This is achieved principally through the award of grants in an annual competition. The grants provide funding to enable successful applicants to locate relevant endangered archival collections, to arrange their transfer to a suitable local archival home where possible, to create digital copies of the material and to deposit the copies with local institutions and the British Library.

Since the Endangered Archives Programme’s founding in 2004, it has funded 338 projects. The program defines archive broadly, not to only include rare printed sources

like books, newspapers, maps, &c., but to embrace manuscripts in any languages, visual materials like drawings, paintings, and photographs, audio and video recordings and objects.

The EAP has implemented archival projects in the following countries:

- Algeria
- Anguilla
- Argentina
- Armenia
- Azerbaijan
- Bangladesh
- Barbados
- Bhutan
- Bolivia
- Botswana
- Brazil
- Bulgaria
- Burkina Faso
- Burundi
- Cameroon
- Chad
- Chile
- China
- Colombia
- Comoros
- Cuba
- East Timor
- Egypt
- Ethiopia
- Federated States of Micronesia
- Gambia
- Georgia
- Ghana
- Grenada
- Guatemala
- Guinea
- Guinea-Bissau
- Haiti
- Hungary
- India
- Indonesia
- Iran
- Israel
- Italy
- Ivory Coast
- Jamaica
- Kenya
- Laos
- Lebanon
- Lesotho
- Liberia
- Libya
- Madagascar
- Malawi
- Mali
- Mauritius
- Mexico
- Mongolia
- Montserrat
- Myanmar
- Nepal
- Nicaragua
- Nigeria
- Pakistan
- Peru
- Philippines
- Republic of Moldova
- Republic of the Congo
- Romania
- Russian Federation
- Saint Helena
- Saint Kitts and Nevis
- Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
- Senegal
- Serbia
- Serbia and Montenegro
- Sierra Leone
- Solomon Islands
- South Africa
- Sri Lanka
- Sudan
- Tajikistan
- Tanzania
- Thailand
- Tristan da Cunha
- Tunisia
- Turks and Caicos Islands
- Tuvalu
- Uganda
- Ukraine
- Uzbekistan
- Vietnam
- Zambia
- Zanzibar
- Zimbabwe



Endangered Archives Programme Member States

The Endangered Archives Programme has done inventory, digitization and access projects in ninety countries that are emblematic of the important role they play in on the ground solutions around the world.

Europeana

Europeana is the continent's digital library and works with thousands of European archives, libraries and museums to share cultural heritage for enjoyment, education and research. Europeana was launched in 2008 and actively federates collections across the continent to make cultural heritage records readily accessible, as expressed in their mission statement. "We transform the world with culture. We build on Europe's rich cultural heritage and make it easier for people to use for work, learning or pleasure. Our work contributes to an open, knowledgeable and creative society."

"We certainly have made inroads in helping implement UN Resolution 2347 with 53 million records and digital objects, from 3,700 cultural heritage institutions across 30+ countries in Europe, available for anyone to data-mine, use, re-use, including the relevant authorities."

**Jill Cousins, Executive Director
Europeana**

Europeana Collections provides access to over 50 million digitized items with sophisticated search and filter tools. The website explains how they approach accessibility. "All across Europe, museums, galleries, libraries and archives are digitizing their collections so that anyone anywhere can explore and learn from them. Once these collections are made public online, we work hard to make sure you can find, use and share them: for research, for learning, for creating new things...Our Collections aim to make this valuable content more accessible and more beneficial to more and more people."

There is wide engagement with and federation projects in Europeana Member States, including:

- Austria
- Belgium
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary
- Ireland
- Israel
- Italy
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Malta
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- Russia
- Serbia
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- UK



Europeana Member States

Because of the extensive federation that Europeana does with existing collections, its support of UNSC 2347 is especially strong on access. Executive Director Jill Cousins explains that digitization of cultural heritage offers additional benefits and “creates a definitive record at the individual item/object level, which with existing technologies can be at a level of detail not visible to the naked eye. Such detail also permits the use of digital matching techniques to check the item against others, including fakes.”

Europeana also offers a level of security against theft from member collections by providing a thorough inventory as well as records that can be checked in the event that a stolen item shows up in the market.

International Digital Ephemera Project

The [International Digital Ephemera Project](#) (IDEP) takes as its collecting interest ephemera, cultural records that were expected to have short-term usefulness or interest. According to their website, these ephemera range “from fragile early 20th century newspapers to posters, postcards, cellphone videos, and much more. These collections represent significant content that was used during political movements, but that is ephemeral in nature and likely to be lost without proactive curation.”

Another significant characteristic of the IDEP is its strong commitment to international collecting. The Project seeks to be “an innovative and forward-looking initiative to capture ephemeral content with global partners. Through this project, UCLA Library endeavors to build international and global collections of knowledge and to preserve the historical and cultural record so that present and future generations can access and use ephemera that document the larger arena of discourse that takes place alongside mainstream media and scholarly.”

Member States with federated collections as part of the IDEP include:

- Armenia
- Cuba
- Egypt
- Iran
- Iraq
- Israel
- Palestine
- South Africa



International Digital Ephemera Project Member States

The International Digital Ephemera Project is funded privately by the Arcadia Fund.

Summation

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2347 is a critical step in creating a unified approach to cultural heritage preservation. Its significance in outlining a process for Member States to follow to strengthen their cultural heritage preservation policy makes it a historic step for the UN and Member States. With any policy guidance, there are always challenges to implementation. Those challenges are made that much more critical in this time of urgency during which irreplaceable cultural artifacts and material is under threat from looting, the illicit trade, and terrorists. That is why UNSC 2347 also calls for a report from UN agencies and affiliate organizations on how implementation is proceeding by the end of 2017.

We believe digital libraries provide excellent news on implementation of UN policy. The organizations we cite are international digital libraries that are making a difference by enacting UNSC 2347 with ongoing inventory, digitization, and accessibility projects that specifically address the recommendations of Article 17, section (a). There are many more projects like these that are not part of international libraries, but accomplish the same goals. They too deserve credit for activating UN policy.

Finally, a closer look at these international projects reveals another very important factor. Member States are heeding the call to action for cultural heritage protection. Our examples reveal scores of countries in which inventory, digitization, and accessibility projects are in process and more widely recognized for their value than ever before. For the cause of inventories, digitization, and accessibility, UN policy is a success as people, organizations, and states follow UNESCO's advice to #unite4heritage.

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