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Joint Press Release by the Ministry of Culture of Thailand and UNESCO Bangkok

UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Field Training Centre on Underwater Cultural Heritage to Open in Chantaburi Province, Thailand on 26 October 2009

Bangkok, 20 October 2009 – Underwater archaeologists from across the region will be taking part in a unique training programme that will make them guardians of shipwrecks and sunken cities in Asian waters.

The training programme is a partnership between UNESCO and the Thai Ministry of Culture. Training will be conducted at the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Field Training Centre in Underwater Cultural Heritage.

The Training Centre was established in early 2009 in Chanthaburi Province, Thailand and is hosted by the Underwater Archaeology Division of the Thai Fine Arts Department.

The first foundation course in underwater cultural heritage will be launched on 26 October 2009 at the Training Centre.

Mr Suriya Soucksakit, Vice Minister for Culture of Thailand, will preside over the opening ceremony, along with representatives from UNESCO Bangkok and provincial dignitaries.

Sixteen trainees from Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand will attend the foundation course, which will be held from 26 October to 5 December 2009.

The training will include subjects such as maritime law, in situ preservation of shipwrecks and other underwater sites, museology, monitoring techniques and treasure hunters, Asian shipbuilding technology and ethnographic boat recording. Training will include both theory and practical training.
The group will be trained by world-class experts from Australia, England, and the Netherlands.

“Asian maritime archaeologists are still in their infancy, so we must improve their knowledge and skills,” notes Mr Ricardo Favis, project coordinator, at UNESCO Bangkok.

On the treasure hunters trail

The trade in illegal treasure hunting is the biggest threat to thousands of historical artefacts in Asian oceans. Thousands of historical items have already been illegally taken by treasure hunters and if preventative measures are not put into place to combat the illegal trade, even more priceless treasures will disappear from Asian waters.

“Modern technology such as subterranean vehicles and better-equipped divers have enabled treasure hunters to pillage the ocean floors of valuable artefacts, and all countries in the region have had their maritime areas exploited,” said Mr Favis.

During the six-week course, the trainees will be taught the basics of underwater archaeology and underwater cultural heritage management, and the best trainees will get the opportunity to enroll in an advanced course in the subject.

“Centre of Excellence”

The Training Centre is positioned to become a “Centre of Excellence” for the Asia-Pacific region.

In setting up the Centre, valuable input has been provided by the leading professional network in underwater archaeology, the International Committee on Underwater Cultural Heritage of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS-ICUCH).

Training expertise is also being provided by the Nautical Archaeology Society, based in the United Kingdom, and members of the Asian Academy for Heritage Management network, including Silpakorn University (Thailand) and Flinders University (Australia).

The Chantaburi facility has been identified as one of the best-equipped maritime archaeology facilities in the region. It is located in proximity to various shipwreck sites which will allow trainees to field-test practical skills.

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A media field trip will be organized to the site in Chantaburi on 10-11 November 2009. Accommodation and transportation will be provided by UNESCO Bangkok.

For journalists interested in joining the field trip, please contact:

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