[Bangkok, 12 June 2023] - The SEAMEO Regional Centre for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SEAMEO SPAFA), the Fine Arts Department of Thailand, UNESCO and the International Centre for Underwater Archaeology in Zadar (ICUA) are proud to announce their collaboration on a groundbreaking training course aimed at strengthening the conservation and restoration of underwater archaeological finds in South-East Asia. The two-week training course titled, “South-East Asian Sub-regional Introductory Course on Conservation and Restoration of Underwater Archaeological Finds” runs from 19 through 29 June 2023 in Bangkok, Pathum Thani and Chanthaburi, Thailand, and is the first of its kind in this region to cover a diverse range of materials commonly found in underwater cultural heritage sites. “Underwater archaeology presents huge logistical challenges, but underwater environments can preserve organic materials and artefacts to a degree that is rare or impossible on land,” says Franca Cole, an archaeologist and archaeological conservator at Sarawak Museum (JMS), Malaysia, who is one of the course trainers. Participants will gain comprehensive practical knowledge on the conservation and restoration principles and techniques applicable to ceramics, glass, metals, wood, and other organic substances, equipping them with vital skills to protect and preserve these valuable artefacts. Cole adds, “Consciously planning for selective conservation is the single most effective way of balancing research and cultural heritage preservation goals with economic and capacity realities.”

Notably, this collaboration represents the first time that SEAMEO SPAFA, the Fine Arts Department under the Ministry of Culture of Thailand and UNESCO are joining forces to advance the conservation and restoration of underwater cultural heritage. By combining their expertise and resources, including that of the International Centre for Underwater Archaeology (a centre under the auspices of UNESCO (category 2)) in Zadar, Croatia, these renowned institutions aim to enhance the capacity of South-East Asian countries in safeguarding their invaluable underwater heritage for future generations. “We hope to have a new generation of South-East Asian professionals both in underwater archaeology and conservation,” says Mr Khemchat Thepchai, Centre Director of SEAMEO SPAFA.

The training course aligns with the objectives of the UNESCO 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, which provides a common legal framework and practical guidelines for nations to better identify, research, protect, and preserve their underwater heritage. According to Ms Chihiro Nishikawa, UNESCO Programme Specialist, “UNESCO is pleased to resume the training course in the field of underwater cultural heritage in Thailand, following a series of UNESCO underwater archaeology training conducted in Thailand between 2009 to
2011.” Nishikawa envisions that in ten years’ time all South-East Asian countries will have experts in underwater archaeology and the conservation skills sufficient enough to safeguard and sustainably manage underwater cultural heritage in conformity with the UNESCO 2001 Convention.

The media are invited to attend the Opening Ceremony and first day of the course at the SEAMEO SPAFA Centre Building on 19 June 2023; as well as the Closing Ceremony and last day of the course to be held at UNESCO Bangkok on 29 June 2023. Please RSVP your attendance at: https://bit.ly/SEAuch2023media-rsvp

Additional information, including the agenda of the course can be found in the digital media kit here: https://bit.ly/MEDIA-KIT_UnderwaterArchaeologyConservation

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**About SEAMEO SPAFA**
SEAMEO SPAFA is a regional organization that advances research, training, and collaboration in archaeology and fine arts in Southeast Asia, strengthening member countries' capacity and preserving their cultural heritage.

**About the Fine Arts Department**
The Fine Arts Department, under the Ministry of Culture of Thailand, preserves, promotes, and develops Thailand's fine arts and cultural heritage, safeguarding its diverse artistic traditions.

**About UNESCO**
UNESCO promotes international collaboration in education, science, culture, and communication to foster peace, sustainable development, and intercultural dialogue.

**About ICUA**
The International Centre for Underwater Archaeology in Zadar is a centre under the auspices of UNESCO in Croatia, focusing on educational activities and professional development in the fields of research, conservation and restoration and the promotion of underwater cultural heritage, in particular at the international level.