

 [Tweet this](#)  [Share](#)  [Read later](#)

 Posted on Archiving Human Rights, Campaigns, Climate Justice, Internet Shutdowns, Video4Earth, Video4Justice

Vaults Full of Values

Video Archiving for Community Liberation

By Meghana Bahar



This blog post marks the official launch of WITNESS’s global campaign “#ArchiveLife: Preserving Collective Memory through Video Archiving”.

WITNESS launched its [award-winning Activists’ Guide to Archiving Video](#) in July 2013, almost 11 years ago. Since then, we have supported and learned from partners from around the world on video archiving projects. These include, the [People’s Database for Police Accountability](#) with [Berkeley Copwatch](#), [Policing the Police](#) together with [El Grito](#), the [Syrian Archive](#) with [Mnemonic](#), and the [Rohingya Genocide Archive](#) launched in 2022 with [Rohingya Vision](#).



Community Archiving as A Political Project

WITNESS’s learnings over the years inform us that in many contexts where violence and oppression is rife, community video archiving can be

a powerful, subversive and influential act.

Many of us who are activists and community defenders are witnesses to an unprecedented volume of rights infringements that block our access to archiving infrastructure and capacity. We struggle to thrive in a climate of massive disparities in educational opportunities, extreme polarities in economies, and dogged competitiveness in the creation and custody of knowledges.

How can we capture what's essential to our human rights movements in ways that fortify our intersectional experiences? When do our stories cease getting co-opted or dismissed by oppressive forces? How do we protect the veracity of our socio-political and historical memories from erasure?

WITNESS's Approach to Strengthen Collective Memory

Fortunately, we can do something to validate underrepresented truths if we begin to view and engage with community video archiving as decolonial praxis, as a non-negotiable action in the Video for Justice pipeline. From capturing documentation to its future use for justice and accountability, the active preservation of collective memory then becomes intertwined with resistance efforts, which include actual [steps for justice](#).



JUSTICE PIPELINE

Colonizers have heavily documented, extracted and preserved the artifacts of colonized societies for centuries. Documentation that is owned and cared for by communities inevitably interrogates the intersection of financial and imperial structures. Oppressive frameworks systematically eviscerate community truths, and criminally delay the bridging of borders and the healing of colonial traumas.

Community video archiving that seeks to preserve collective memory then, becomes the balm to the sting of institutional hegemony. The narratives of subaltern communities must be re-centered to disrupt and counter colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, imperialism, fascism, and the polycrisis of genocide and ecocide.

WITNESS's moves to support these goals has resulted in the creation of sharable guidance, such as our tip sheet [Should I Collect and Archive These Videos?](#) co-created with [Texas After Violence Project](#), and the series of [video tutorials for documenting during internet shutdowns](#),

released as part of WITNESS's [#EyesOnShutdowns campaign](#), in November 2021.

WITNESS also [engages with C2PA](#) to help reinforce the credibility of media created by the critical voices of human rights defenders, journalists and video archivists.

Last year, WITNESS engaged in the exercise of assessing communities' preservation and archiving needs by disseminating a [multilingual survey](#). The responses will help inform us on the next iteration of the Activists' Guide to Archiving Video, a year-long project that commences this July.

Join WITNESS to Re-Center Community Archiving

Video archiving and preservation will always be an evolving practice. Collaboration is the anchor, not just the key.

WITNESS recognizes the difficulties of communities that document and preserve video while facing numerous obstacles. These include internet shutdowns, platform censorship, state-sanctioned bombardment, institutional racism, unauthorized raids, environmental degradation by extractive corporations, and numerous other human rights abuses. Such devastations leave communities without access to vital resources, skills, tools and equipment, and further erodes substantive proof.



Through our campaign **#ArchiveLife**, WITNESS aims to raise awareness of human rights community video archives and similar initiatives of [recording resistance](#). We will continue to highlight and share:

- Existing and new WITNESS resources on video archiving;
- A live **#ArchiveLife** Huddle online with partners from different regions for assessing local contexts, needs, and/or local archival community of practice;
- Our [survey of human rights audiovisual archiving needs and practices](#) for engaging new participants to better understand the challenges, current practices, and needs of human rights documentarians – some of the responses will be shared during the campaign; and
- Opportunities to engage partners in the campaign for local activation and future initiatives around human rights community video archives.

The collection and curation of stories is the archiving of life itself, and their longevity a memorializing of recorded lives, however bleak, grotesque or joyful. We participate in decolonizing our truths through community video archiving for social upliftment and liberation.

On Campaign Visual Identity Concept



The design work for the **#ArchiveLife** campaign features anthropomorphized bees, their hives and honey, a triple symbol of collectors, the collection space, and the collected.

Our bee-archivists flit across campaign design assets with focused attention. They help bring life to the different roles in preservation processes that move towards the common purpose of social justice. Through conscious collaboration and communication, their work transforms the nectar into honey.

The rainbow-hued balsamic ribbon weaving across and through honeycombs is honey extract. Known as ‘mel’, it is a precious substance rich with minerals and vitamins. This mending can be likened to the bittersweet ingredients of our collective medicines that buttress the justice pipeline.

The main icon throughout campaign materials is the hexagon, the distinct six-sided shape that helps form the hive without gaps. The hexagon bears multiple meanings to cultures across the globe. Ancient Egyptians used it as a protection symbol in the process of mummification, a preservation practice that keeps the human body from decay.

Our chosen symbology alludes to the notion that archiving is a deliberate process, when diligently applied, and leaves no gaps – community video archives serve to protect their contents for eternity, or in memoria.

Follow WITNESS’s regional hubs for multilingual resources:

- WITNESS USA: [Twitter](#) & [Instagram](#)
- WITNESS Asia: [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)
- WITNESS Brazil: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) & [Instagram](#)
- WITNESS Africa: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) & [Instagram](#)
- WITNESS Middle East & North Africa: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) & [Instagram](#)
- WITNESS Latin America & the Caribbean: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) & [Instagram](#)

AUTHOR: [Meghana Bahar](#) [she/her] is the Editor of the WITNESS Blog, and heads WITNESS’s Global Digital Engagement Program. Prior to this, she helped

establish and lead regional communications for WITNESS's Asia-Pacific hub. She has over 25 years experience championing global women's and human rights movements as a gender and media specialist.

~ Published 2nd May 2024.


📌 Archived in Archiving Human Rights, Campaigns, Climate Justice, Internet Shutdowns, Video4Earth, Video4Justice and tagged #ArchiveLife, archives, Archiving, community archiving, digital preservation, memorializing, video archiving.

🔗 Share this article: [f Facebook](#) [🐦 Twitter](#)

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment *

 Name *

 Email *

