



**International Visitor  
Leadership Program**  
U.S. Department of State

***Updated May 14, 2026***

**Freedom 250: Cultural Heritage Preservation and Celebration  
A Multi-Regional Project  
GROUP C: NEW MEXICO AND SOUTH DAKOTA**

These visitors are invited to the United States under the auspices of the Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program. Their program is arranged by Meridian International Center.

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**Santa Fe, New Mexico: June 26 – July 1, 2026**

**Rapid City, South Dakota: July 1 – 7, 2026**

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**OVERALL PROFESSIONAL OBJECTIVES**

*The Department of State has outlined the following specific objectives for the project:*

- Showcase leading practices in cultural heritage preservation, policy development, and interagency collaboration;
- Examine innovative models for community engagement, educational programming, and outreach.
- Explore strategies to prevent the destruction, looting, and trafficking of cultural heritage;
- Increase knowledge of U.S. laws and law enforcement mechanisms to prevent smuggling of cultural property into and out of the United States;

- Provide opportunities for creation of partnerships and linkages with U.S. museums, auction houses, academic institutions, U.S. law enforcement agencies, and other entities that manage, protect, and preserve cultural property.

#### **SPECIFIC THEMES TO EXPLORE IN NEW MEXICO**

- Strategies for the preservation and stewardship of historical, archaeological, and cultural heritage assets across state governments, museums, and markets for the promotion of cultural tourism as a driver of economic development

#### **SPECIFIC THEMES TO EXPLORE IN SOUTH DAKOTA**

- Best practices among federal, state, and tribal governments, as well as private organizations in preservation and stewardship of historical, archaeological and cultural heritage assets
- Observance of Independence Day

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>Afroza Khan MITA</b> Regional Director, Regional Directorate Office, Department of Archaeology, Dhaka and Mymensingh Division
<b>Belize</b>	<b>Akirah AUGUST</b> Research and Enforcement Officer, Institute of Archaeology, National Institute of Culture and History
<b>Costa Rica</b>	<b>Arturo HERNANDEZ RUIZ</b> Coordinator and Curator of Archaeological Collections, National Museum of Costa Rica
<b>Iraq</b>	<b>Dlshad MARF</b> University Professor, Archaeology Department, University of Sulaimani
<b>Nepal</b>	<b>Pashupati NYAUPANE</b> Assistant Professor, Central Department of Nepalese History, Culture and Archaeology, Tribhuvan University
<b>Rwanda</b>	<b>Colombe UMUHOZA</b> Head Guide, Kigali Genocide Memorial
<b>Vanuatu</b>	<b>Richard SHING</b> Director, Vanuatu Cultural Center

## BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

### **Bangladesh**

*Name:* **Afroza Khan MITA**

*City:* Dhaka

*Present Position:* Regional Director, Department of Archaeology, Dhaka and Mymensingh Division

*Concurrent Position:* Deputy Project Director, Conservation and Development of the Important Archaeological Sites of Mymensingh Division

*Email Address:* mitaafrozakhan@gmail.com

*Languages:* Bangla (primary), English

*U.S. Travel:* No previous U.S. travel

*Professional Background:* An archaeologist by training, **Afroza Khan Mita** is the regional director of the Department of Archaeology under Bangladesh's Ministry of Cultural Affairs, with responsibility for more than 120 archaeological sites in Dhaka and Mymensingh, including the former The U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) site at Lalbagh Fort. She is also actively involved in several archaeological excavation projects.

**Belize**

*Name:* **Akirah AUGUST**

*City:* Belmopan

*Present Position:* Research and Enforcement Officer, Institute of Archaeology,  
National Institute of Culture and History

*Email Address:* iaoutreach@nichbelize.org

*Languages:* English (primary)

*U.S. Travel:* Arkansas, New York, Tennessee, Virginia

*Professional Background:* **Akirah August** works for the National Institute of Culture and History's Institute of Archaeology where her role includes developing the Belize National Collection, monitoring archaeological research projects, and facilitating and engaging in fieldwork with U.S. and other global universities and researchers.

## **Costa Rica**

*Name:* **Arturo HERNANDEZ RUIZ**

*City:* Alajuela

*Present Position:* Coordinator and Curator of Archaeological Collections,  
National Museum of Costa Rica

*Email Address:* arturohernand41@gmail.com

*Languages:* Spanish (primary), English, Portuguese

*U.S. Travel:* Florida, New York

*Professional Background:* **Arturo Hernández Ruiz** coordinates and curates archaeological collections at the National Museum of Costa Rica. In addition to leading land and subaquatic archaeological conservation projects, he has provided technical coordination on preventative conservation strategies and proactive engagement in preventing the illicit trafficking of archaeological artifacts.

## **Iraq**

*Name:* **Dlshad Aziz MAREF**

*City:* Sulaimaniyah

*Present Position:* University Professor, Archaeology Department, University of Sulaimani

*Email Address:* dlshad.marf@univsul.edu.iq

*Languages:* Kurdish (primary), English, Arabic

*U.S. Travel:* California

*Professional Background:* ***Dlshad Marf*** is an archaeologist, university professor, and documentary producer with nearly two decades of experience in the study and preservation of human heritage. His work bridges academic research, cultural preservation, field archaeology, and public education, emphasizing the interconnectedness of cultures and the importance of understanding heritage within an open scientific framework.

## **Nepal**

*Name:* **Pashupati NYAUPANE**

*City:* Lumbini

*Present Position:* Assistant Professor, Central Department of Nepalese History, Culture and Archaeology, Tribhuvan University

*Email Address:* pashupati.neupane@cdnhca.tu.edu.np

*Languages:* Nepali (primary), English

*U.S. Travel:* No previous U.S. travel

*Professional Background:* ***Pashupati Nyaupane*** is an assistant professor at the Central Department of Nepalese History, Culture, and Archaeology at Tribhuvan University and is a nationally recognized leader in cultural heritage preservation. Through his efforts, over 50 traditional settlements have been documented and preserved. Nyaupane has been instrumental in developing heritage curricula in Nepal and advocating for community-based preservation models.

## **Rwanda**

*Name:* **Colombe UMUHOZA**

*City:* Kigali

*Present Position:* Head Guide, Kigali Genocide Memorial

*Email Address:* colombe.umuhoza@aegitrust.org.rw

*Languages:* Kinyarwanda/Rwanda (primary), English

*U.S. Travel:* No previous U.S. travel

*Professional Background:* **Colombe Umuhoza** is head guide at the Kigali Genocide Memorial where she educates visitors about Rwanda's history. In this role, she coordinates visits to the memorial and assists with administrative operations. Umuhoza's work has helped highlight the importance of Rwandan history on local and global platforms.

## **Vanuatu**

*Name:* **Richard SHING**

*City:* Port Vila

*Present Position:* Director, Vanuatu Cultural Center

*Email Address:* shinr@vanuatu.gov.vu

*Languages:* Melanesian Pidgin (primary), English

*U.S. Travel:* No previous U.S. travel

*Professional Background:* **Richard Shing** is the director of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre where he oversees the National Museum, National Archives, National Library, and the National Film and Sound Unit. These institutions play a vital role in protecting, promoting, and developing Vanuatu's custom and culture, as well as serving as focal points for archaeological and research work.