



## RAMSAR COP9 HIGHLIGHTS MONDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2005

Delegates to Ramsar COP9 met in the morning and afternoon Plenary sessions to further consider and adopt draft resolutions, and hear reports of the Credentials and Finance Committees, and technical sessions. In the afternoon, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni addressed the COP. The Finance Committee convened twice, and contact groups on cultural values and avian flu continued deliberations. The COP elected the members of the Standing Committee for the 2006-2008 triennium.

### PLENARY

#### ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF UGANDA:

Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni highlighted threats to wetland ecosystems, which cover 13 percent of the country's land area and include the headwaters of the River Nile, and outlined possible solutions. He identified as threats: deforestation and silting of wetland ecosystems; conversion of wetlands into agricultural lands, including pastures, farms and rice paddies; international environmental NGOs for their opposition to energy plans, which he said leads to over-reliance on firewood; and predominance of the rural population and agriculture in Uganda. He noted as solutions: universal education; reafforestation programmes which generate income for local communities; electrification through hydro, geothermal and solar energy projects; and industrialization.

**DRAFT RESOLUTIONS: Improving management of the Ramsar Convention:** CANADA introduced its proposed COP9 DR26, noting it seeks to establish a small-scale, no-cost, temporary Management Working Group to review the Convention's decision-making mechanisms and generate recommendations for COP10. He also noted that the Ramsar Secretary General will be part of the Group alongside Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Standing Committee and of the STRP established at COP8 and COP9, Subgroup on Finance Chairs of COP8 and COP9, and representatives of interested Parties and International Organization Partners (IOPs).

AUSTRALIA welcomed the draft resolution provided the review is small-scale, self-financing and time-bound. Supporting the resolution, the EU suggested the group: include an external expert; be given *ad hoc* status; report regularly to the Steering Committee on progress made before COP10; and undertake a review of regional meetings. SWITZERLAND supported the EU, except for the proposed external expert. MEXICO opposed the EU proposal, but supported an external expert's involvement. ECUADOR, supported by the BAHAMAS and SURINAME, called for equitable regional representation. Secretary

General Peter Bridgewater stressed the group should not have cost implications for the Secretariat, which may limit regional participation.

**Designation and management of [transnational] [transboundary] Ramsar sites:** Bridgewater introduced COP9 DR6, noting that the draft resolution will be bracketed and deferred to COP10 for further consideration, and that, in the meantime, the Secretary General will consult with IUCN on legal, immigration and other implications of establishing transboundary sites. LESOTHO and SENEGAL expressed concern over forwarding the draft resolution to COP10 while activities are being carried out on [transnational] [transboundary] sites. EL SALVADOR reiterated its reservation regarding the draft resolution. With these comments to be reflected in the COP9 report, delegates agreed to forward the draft resolution to COP10.

TURKEY reiterated its concerns voiced at Ramsar COP7 and COP8 with regard to river basin management, which it considers being outside of Ramsar's scope. He noted his country's reservations on draft resolutions on additional scientific and technical guidance for implementing the Ramsar wise use concept (COP9 DR1), the Convention's engagement in ongoing multilateral processes dealing with water (COP9 DR3), and designation and management of [transnational] [transboundary] Ramsar sites (COP9 DR6), requesting that these reservations be included in the COP9 report.

#### Guidance for addressing Ramsar sites or parts of sites which no longer meet the Criteria for designation:

On COP9 DR7 Rev.1, INDIA stressed that the resolution's guidance should not impinge on the sovereign rights of a contracting Party. With this reservation to be included in the COP9 report, the draft resolution was adopted without further amendment.

**Use of the term "Ramsar Secretariat":** On COP9 DR11 Rev.1, delegates debated language referring to "appropriate bodies," with the EU favoring use of "international organization," SWITZERLAND stating that "bodies" is the correct term, which refers to law centers and not the host country, and others proposing alternate versions. MALI, supported by the EU, suggested a new paragraph clarifying the status of the Ramsar Convention as an intergovernmental treaty, composed of sovereign States. JAPAN suggested the Secretary General report through the Standing Committee to COP10 on progress made. NAMIBIA questioned cost implications associated with the resolution. Following these discussions, the Secretariat announced the resolution would undergo a second revision.

**Establishment of the Ramsar Endowment Fund as a mechanism to resource the Small Grants Fund:** Bridgewater introduced COP9 DR14 Rev.1, noting that substantive changes concerning language on ensuring that sources of funding are



sought for developing countries did not change the resolution's intention. GHANA, supported by JAPAN, ARMENIA and CANADA, suggested adding the wording "for all regions." Highlighting funding constraints, IRAN, supported by ISRAEL, requested that the decision mention the Asian region specifically. Bridgewater said that the region's concerns would be recorded in the COP9 report, and the draft resolution was adopted.

**Status of Ramsar sites of international importance:** The Secretariat introduced various amendments to COP9 DR16 Rev.1, inviting Parties to submit their site updates to the Rapporteur. EL SALVADOR, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, JAMAICA and ROMANIA provided updated country information. LESOTHO requested clarification on the Annex concerning missing Ramsar Information Sheets, with PORTUGAL suggesting that in the future a table be included in the Annex that would highlight missing information. A paragraph expressing concern over the number of third party reports received by the Secretariat was deleted, as suggested by ARGENTINA, with CANADA, SWEDEN, IRAN, EL SALVADOR and AUSTRIA opposing ARGENTINA's second request to delete a sub-paragraph on reporting changes in ecological character. The resolution was adopted with these amendments.

**Review of COP decisions:** The Secretariat submitted COP9 DR18 Rev.1 for adoption by the COP, noting it contains new provisions stating: the Secretariat, the STRP and Standing Committee should review recommendations and resolutions from COP1 onwards for contradictory or redundant advice on policy, but not the Convention text itself. It also instructs the Secretariat to develop the Terms of Reference and identify service providers for consideration and approval of the Standing Committee, and outlines the procedure if a contradiction is identified. The Secretariat noted that any additional costs would be met through extra-budgetary funds. Following suggestions by the UK and ARGENTINA, the text was simplified to state the results of the review will be submitted to COP10 for consideration. The UK and AUSTRALIA urged only appointing service providers as appropriate. The resolution was adopted as amended.

**CEPA Oversight Panel:** The Secretariat submitted COP9 DR19 Rev.1 for adoption by the COP. AUSTRALIA pointed out inconsistencies in translating the terms "supervision" and "information," requesting these be changed to "monitoring" and "reporting." MEXICO requested an explicit reference to the Panel reporting to the Standing Committee, and IRAN highlighted the importance of translating the Panel's materials into the Convention's official and other languages. With these remarks to be included in the COP9 report, the resolution was adopted.

**The importance of regional wetland symposia in effectively implementing the Convention:** The Secretariat introduced COP9 DR20 Rev.1, which was adopted by the COP with minor amendments.

**Integrated, cross-biome planning and management of wetlands, especially in small island developing States:** The Secretariat introduced COP9 DR21 Rev.1, and the COP adopted the resolution without amendment.

#### **REPORTS: Report of the Credentials Committee:**

Committee Chair Ken Brock (Canada) introduced Annex I to the COP9 report, noting 116 contracting Parties have supplied valid credentials. Delegates agreed that the credentials process would be open until 12:00pm on Tuesday, 15 November to allow Parties to finalize registration.

**Reports of the technical sessions:** Delegates heard reports on the two technical sessions held on Saturday, 12 November. Kemi Awoyinka, Wetlands International, presented the outcomes of the session on applying the wise use principle in integrated water management and Tobias Salathé, Ramsar Secretariat, of the session on culture and knowledge in wetland management.

**Report of the Finance Committee:** Chair Trevor Swerdfager (Canada) reported on progress made in discussing financial and budgetary matters (COP9 DR13) in the Committee, which met twice during the day to consider allocation of funds in the proposed core budget for the 2006-2008 triennium.

He reported that, in response to a shortfall in each fiscal year's budget, discussions focused on identifying reductions to balance the budget in areas, including: the Ramsar sites database, communication, regional initiatives, and CEPA operating costs. Chair Swerdfager said a final COP9 DR13 based on a four percent increase in the budget would be presented to Plenary for adoption on Tuesday, 15 November.

#### **ELECTION OF PARTIES TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE**

The following countries were selected to represent Ramsar's six regions: Samoa for Oceania; US for North America; Bahamas, El Salvador and Ecuador for the Neotropics; Austria, Czech Republic, Georgia and Slovenia for Europe; Benin, Gabon, Kenya and Malawi for Africa; and China, Iran and Thailand for Asia. Uganda will also serve on the Standing Committee as the COP9 host country, joined by the COP10 host country, once selected by the COP.

#### **CONTACT GROUPS**

**DR1 ANNEX B AND DR 22:** After hours of contact group discussions on the revised Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the list of Wetlands of International Importance (COP9 DR1 Annex B, Rev. 1), delegates reached a compromise text concerning guidance on artificial wetlands and the wording of "near-natural" wetland type for Criterion 1, and deleting the table of ecosystem benefits. Delegates agreed to, *inter alia*, language on measures being consistent with rights and obligations under other international agreements in the resolution on cultural values (COP9 DR22).

**AVIAN FLU:** The contact group met in the evening to continue consideration of COP9 DR25 Rev.1. The group amended the resolution with further comments, including: adding the word "captive" before the word "birds"; deleting a paragraph on providing information on instances of waterbird mortality to national authorities; and requesting a report on the Ramsar Secretariat and STRP's work with relevant agencies at COP10.

#### **IN THE BREEZEWAYS**

Delegates woke up Monday morning to the news that Uganda's President was finally due to address the COP that afternoon. They soon found themselves struggling amidst heightened security to get from the Speke Resort's "breezeways" into the Plenary, forced to shed cell phones, laptops and lighters on the way. For those who managed to reach the Plenary on time, the Presidential address provided a frank perspective on the root causes of wetland degradation, as well as attainable solutions, each accented by anecdotes from the dietary habits of US basketball teams to a reading from Genesis XI:4.

On the substantive side, things seemed to progress much more smoothly once cell phones were returned, and heads of delegations were able to receive instructions from their capitals. With the closing of the COP looming large, delegates were more amenable to compromising on perhaps the most debated COP9 issue: cultural values in designation of Ramsar sites, as well as managing to finalize the draft resolution on avian flu. It appears that COP9 has been successful in avoiding late-night negotiation sessions, much to the delight of the Secretariat but perhaps to the chagrin of some negotiations enthusiasts. The final day of the COP will reveal if this holds true.

**ENB SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS:** The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of Ramsar COP9 will be available on Friday, 18 November 2005 online at: <http://www.iisd.ca/ramsar/cop9/>