

RAMSAR COP 11 HIGHLIGHTS: SUNDAY, 8 JULY 2012

COP 11 met in plenary throughout the day. The day commenced with a special presentation on the outcomes of Rio+20 and their implications for the Ramsar Convention. The plenary addressed issues arising from Resolutions and Recommendations of the previous meetings of the COP, the financial report for 2009-2012 and the proposed budget for the triennium 2013-2015, and election of parties for the Standing Committee (SC) 2013-2015. They also began consideration of the draft resolutions and recommendations submitted by parties and the SC. The Credentials and the Finance and Budget Committees also convened. A number of side events took place during lunch.

PLENARY

SPECIAL PRESENTATION ON OUTCOMES OF RIO+20 AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE RAMSAR CONVENTION: Keynote speaker Brice Lalonde, Executive Coordinator of Rio+20, UNDESA, presented outcomes from Rio+20, noting that the official declaration contained a number of mandates for the UN to transform itself and work more efficiently.

On the institutional framework for sustainable development, he highlighted agreement to strengthen and upgrade UNEP, and create a high-level forum close to the UN Economic and Social Council. He identified other priority issues at Rio+20, some relevant to the Ramsar Convention, including: water, and the nexus between energy, food and water; nature; biodiversity; sustainable cities; oceans, especially beyond national jurisdiction; a 10-year framework programme on sustainable consumption and production; jobs; gender equality; and corporate sustainability reporting.

He emphasized the agreement to create Sustainable Development Goals as the most exciting outcome of Rio+20, noting that the relationship between these and the Millennium Development Goals, and the nature of such goals, are still to be discussed.

SWITZERLAND underscored the failure to mention wetlands in the Rio+20 outcome document and called on parties to promote the transboundary aspects of wetlands management.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Rules of Procedure:

The Secretariat explained amendments to the Rules of Procedure (COP11 Doc.2 Rev.1 Add.1) rule 5 (on notification of the COP agenda) and rule 26 (on the Conference Committee, other committees and working groups), and the COP adopted them as amended.

REPORTS: Issues Arising from Resolutions and

Recommendations of Previous Meetings of the COP: The Secretariat noted that all issues arising from previous meetings of the COP are already covered in the agenda of COP 11.

Financial Report for 2009-2012 by the Chairperson of the SC Subgroup on Finance and Proposed Budget for the Triennium 2013-2015: Tiina Niikonen, Chair, SC Subgroup on Finance, Finland, presented the documentation on financial and budgetary matters (COP11 Doc.15) and the proposed budget for 2013-2015 (COP11 Doc.16), noting the draft resolution on financial and budgetary matters (COP11 DR.2). She explained that for the first time the COP will approve a combined budget, which includes the core budget funded by parties' contributions and the non-core element to be financed by additional voluntary contributions.

Ramsar Secretary General Anada Tiéga emphasized the need to ensure resources are available to the Secretariat to enable them to fulfill their mandate and to reverse the declining trend in voluntary contributions.

SOUTH AFRICA noted, with reference to the proposed 2% *per annum* increase to the core budget, that the Convention should look into ways to improve Secretariat efficiency.

Report on Partnerships: Claudia Fenerol, Ramsar Secretariat, described Ramsar partnership activities, highlighting the launch of a Ramsar website on partnerships. She described new agreements with Ducks Unlimited, and partnerships signed with the World Bank, including the Global Partnership for Oceans, Wealth Accounting and the Valuation of Ecosystem Services, and the TEEB for Water and Wetlands initiative.

In response to the presentation, IRAN and the ARAB LEAGUE urged increasing support for partnerships at the regional level, with CAMEROON requesting an inventory of partnerships in Africa. SWITZERLAND and JAPAN requested more evidence of concrete outcomes. CUBA emphasized the importance of Rio+20 in shaping future partnerships. SENEGAL and CONGO highlighted the need for a Global Environment Facility focal point for wetlands to ensure project financing at local, national, sub-regional and transboundary levels. BENIN stressed the potential for private sector partnerships. Ramsar Secretary General Tiéga reiterated a programme-based approach to partnerships to ensure their sustainability.

CONSIDERATION OF THE DRAFT RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Institutional Hosting of the

Ramsar Secretariat: In the morning, COP 11 President Mihail Făcă introduced the Draft Resolution on Institutional Hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat (COP11 DR.1 and Doc.17), asking parties their preference for hosting of the Secretariat by IUCN

or UNEP and noting that without consensus, a decision would require a two-thirds majority.

BRAZIL, COLOMBIA, CUBA, FINLAND, PANAMA, URUGUAY, PERU, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, SOUTH AFRICA, THAILAND, UGANDA, VENEZUELA and the REPUBLIC OF KOREA supported UNEP to host the Secretariat. SWITZERLAND also favored UNEP, but proposed to keep the Secretariat in Gland, Switzerland. PANAMA requested the move be done on “a gradual basis.” Parties identified reasons for UNEP as host, including: the decision at Rio+20 to strengthen UNEP; the need to improve the political status of the Ramsar Convention; and to enable synergies with other instruments.

ARGENTINA, BELGIUM, CANADA, DENMARK, INDONESIA, JAPAN, MALAYSIA, MEXICO, NEW ZEALAND, NORWAY, TUNISIA, TURKEY, the US, the CZECH REPUBLIC, COSTA RICA, FRANCE, AUSTRIA, ALGERIA, LIBYA, CAMBODIA and BENIN preferred that IUCN remain the Secretariat host, with some noting IUCN has done a good job hosting the Secretariat over the past forty years. Parties said switching to UNEP would increase the costs of the hosting arrangements, cause the loss of institutional knowledge and capacity, and distract attention from the work of the Convention. COSTA RICA, with the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO, said any decision on hosting arrangements could be reconsidered in the future.

AUSTRALIA preferred the decision to be based on consensus and CANADA said the location of the Secretariat should be identified in the resolution. The US, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION and UGANDA highlighted the need for COP 11 to take a decision on this matter, as the issue has been negotiated for seven years.

CONGO suggested distinguishing between institutional hosting and the issue of raising the status of Ramsar to be on par with other multilateral environmental agreements.

In the afternoon, COP 11 President Făcă proposed an indicative vote or “straw poll” on the UNEP and IUCN options. He emphasized that an indicative vote is not decisive, but may provide guidance to the COP Presidency on how best to proceed, including whether or not to proceed to a formal vote. Deputy Secretary General Nick Davidson noted this was only the second occasion a vote has been held, the first time being in Costa Rica at COP 7.

FINLAND, SOUTH AFRICA, COSTA RICA, SUDAN, INDIA, the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO and SENEGAL opposed an indicative vote, saying it is not part of the Rules of Procedure. SUDAN proposed closing the debate and putting the issue to a formal vote as soon as the report of the Credentials Committee is ready.

DENMARK and JAPAN supported an indicative vote, viewing it as a “friendly instrument” to work towards consensus and avoid a formal vote.

COP 11 President Făcă then proposed the COP vote on his proposal of an indicative vote. 61 parties voted in favor of an indicative vote, 44 parties were opposed and 10 parties abstained.

The COP then proceeded to the indicative vote. The results were: 66 parties in favor of the IUCN solution; 26 parties in favor of the UNEP solution; and 18 parties abstaining.

Făcă, noting the results, suspended discussion until Monday, 9 July.

Adjustments to the Strategic Plan 2009-2015 for the 2013-2015 Triennium: Deputy Secretary General Davidson introduced the draft resolution (COP11 DR.3) emphasizing that the adjustments proposed are minor refinements to the Ramsar Strategic Plan and aim at highlighting the contribution of the Convention towards the achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets of the CBD’s Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. Denmark, for the EU Member States present

at the COP and Croatia, JAPAN, AUSTRALIA, CHILE, INDIA, SWITZERLAND, SOUTH AFRICA, COLOMBIA, PERU, LIBYA, CAMEROON and BURUNDI supported the adjustments but suggested several editorial changes. Further consideration of this draft resolution was postponed until a revised draft is circulated by the Secretariat, incorporating the comments submitted by the parties.

The Status of Sites in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance: Deputy Secretary General Davidson introduced the draft resolution on the Status of Sites in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance (COP11 DR.4 Rev.1, and Doc.s 8 and 30), noting that the Secretariat had received updates or amendments from ARGENTINA, NEW ZEALAND and the UKRAINE. CROATIA, DENMARK, for the EU Member States present at the COP, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION and TURKEY said they had or would send amendments to the Secretariat.

ARGENTINA, COLOMBIA, MEXICO and PERU suggested Annex 2 (Ramsar Sites with human-induced negative changes having occurred, occurring or likely to occur) to the Draft Resolution be separated into reports by third parties and contracting parties, with COLOMBIA stressing that it should be clear who reported. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION called for removal of Russian Federation Ramsar Sites from Annex 2, saying they had not been consulted on their inclusion, and POLAND requested removal of Biebrzanski National Park, reporting reversal of a decision on road development.

NEW ZEALAND proposed the STRP provide examples of efforts to develop and implement Ramsar Site nominations. The EU, also for Croatia, linked the current discussion to the one on streamlining procedures for describing Ramsar Sites (COP11 DR.8).

Deputy Secretary General Davidson responded that a Rev.2 document will be prepared and requested delegates to submit factual corrections. On Annex 2, he indicated that separation of listings could be considered in the future.

ELECTION OF CONTRACTING PARTIES FOR THE STANDING COMMITTEE 2013-2015: The COP elected parties to the Ramsar SC for the coming triennium. The following parties were selected to represent Ramsar’s six regions on the SC: Fiji for Oceania; Canada for North America; Cuba, Guatemala and Chile, for the Neo-tropics; Denmark, France, Croatia and Finland, for Europe; South Africa, Burundi, Tunisia and Guinea, for Africa; and the Republic of Korea, Cambodia and the United Arab Emirates, for Asia.

IN THE CORRIDORS

While some delegates in the morning expressed hope that the issue of institutional hosting could be quickly resolved due to the two clear options in the text, it soon became apparent that disagreement present through the last two COPs endured, with parties firmly entrenched in pro-IUCN or pro-UNEP camps. After numerous plenary interventions seemed to indicate the two options were “neck-and-neck,” some parties welcomed the COP Presidency’s suggestion to hold a straw poll to “see where things stand.” Yet others were dissatisfied with what they felt was a deviation from the Rules of Procedure, with one emphasizing that an “issue of this importance should not be addressed in such an informal manner.”

The “straw poll” did occur after a “somewhat historic” move by the COP Presidency to hold a vote to determine whether or not to undertake the informal vote, which was without precedent at a Ramsar COP. The results, according to a veteran of the process, revealed the “silent majority” in favor of retaining the IUCN as institutional host. One observer called the results a “reality check,” saying having hard numbers on the table will move parties closer to consensus.