

CITES COP17 HIGHLIGHTS: SATURDAY, 24 SEPTEMBER 2016

The seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP17) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) convened in the morning in Johannesburg, South Africa. South Africa's President Jacob Zuma opened CoP17 and said his country is taking actions to address the illegal trade of wildlife as called for by the UN General Assembly and UN Environment Assembly. He stressed the importance of wildlife conservation to sustaining local communities and economic development through hunting and ecotourism. John Scanlon, CITES Secretary-General, welcomed Angola, Iraq, EU, Tajikistan and Tonga as new Parties to CITES.

In the afternoon, participants began tackling the long agenda, starting with the Rules of Procedure. Given ongoing disagreements, Emily Nkoana-Mashabane Maite, the CoP17 Chair, proposed, and the CoP agreed, to establish an overnight working group to resolve the voting rights of a regional economic integration organization (REIO), and report back to Plenary on Sunday.

OPENING OF THE MEETING

John Scanlon, Secretary-General, CITES, highlighted the challenges in fighting illegal wildlife trade and ensuring legal and sustainable trade. He noted that CoP17 is not just about those challenges, but what CITES is doing to meet them.

Øystein Størkersen, Standing Committee (SC) Chair, expressed concern that half of CITES Parties still do not have legislation that complies with the CITES Convention. He also noted an increase in political support and highlighted positive impacts from valuable collaborations and initiatives such as the National Ivory Action Plans (NIAPs).

Erik Solheim, Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), commended the efforts of those working on the frontlines of wildlife protection, including anti-poaching units, customs officers and rangers. Noting that CITES cannot succeed in isolation, he stressed the importance of working with local communities, and halting illegal wildlife trade.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

ELECTION OF OFFICERS: In the afternoon, the CoP appointed: Emily Nkoana-Mashabane Maite, Minister of International Relations and Cooperation (South Africa) as CoP

Chair and Edna Molewa, Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs (South Africa), as alternate; as vice-chair Cyril Taolo (Botswana) and Shereefa Al-Salem (Kuwait) as alternate; Karen Gaynor (Ireland) as Chair of Committee I; Jonathan Barzdo (Switzerland) as Chair of Committee II; and Bandar Al Faleh (Saudi Arabia) as Chair of the Credentials Committee.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND WORKING PROGRAMME: The Secretariat introduced the agenda (CoP17 Doc.2 (Rev.2)) and working programme (CoP17 Doc. 3 (Rev.2)). The CoP adopted the documents.

RULES OF PROCEDURE: CoP Chair Mashabane introduced the three documents on Rules of Procedure, namely the Report of the Secretariat (CoP17 Doc.4.1 (Rev.1)), the proposal of Botswana and South Africa (CoP16 Doc.4.2 (Rev.1)) and the proposal of Israel (CoP16 Doc.4.3 (Rev.1)). She highlighted the proposed amendment related to the participation of a regional economic integration organization (REIO) as a Party to the Convention, specifically the paragraph stating that REIOs shall exercise their right to vote with a number of votes equal to the number of Member States that are Parties to the Convention.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION expressed the view that only the votes of CoP-attending EU members should count. The US, supported by VENEZUELA, said that only the votes of registered and accredited REIO members should be counted and added that REIOs should only participate in matters related to their competence. KUWAIT, on behalf of QATAR, BAHRAIN, SAUDI ARABIA, and others, expressed support for the US proposal.

MEXICO highlighted that REIOs have a right to vote with a number of votes equal to the number of Member States that are Parties to the Convention. The EU expressed support for the Secretariat's proposed Rule 26 on Rules of Procedures wherein in the fields of their competence, REIOs shall exercise their right to vote with a number of votes equal to the number of their Member States that are Parties to the Convention; and such organizations shall not exercise their right to vote if their Member States exercise theirs, and vice versa. However, the EU noted it could support the bracketed text saying that when REIOs exercise their right to vote, they shall do so only with a number of votes equal to the number of their Member States that are present at the time of the vote, and eligible to vote. CANADA suggested withdrawing proposed changes to Rules of Procedure and

postponing them to a later date. With regard to voting rights of REIOs, he stressed that Article 21 of the Convention, as amended in 1983 (Gabarone amendment), is clear about voting rights of REIOs and therefore the proposed bracketed text goes against the Convention.

The CoP17 Chair proposed, and the CoP agreed, setting up a working group to work overnight to address disagreement over REIO voting rights and report back to Plenary on Sunday.

ESTABLISHMENT OF CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE:

Øystein Størkersen, SC Chair, reported that SC66 had nominated a chair and four members for the Credentials Committee. Two additional nominations were provided in plenary, bringing Credentials Committee membership to six. The CoP adopted these nominations by acclamation.

ADMISSION OF OBSERVERS: The Secretariat introduced the agenda item (CoP17 Doc.6 (Rev.1)), which the CoP accepted without amendment.

STRATEGIC MATTERS

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT: Øystein Størkersen, SC Chair, introduced the SC report (CoP17 Doc.10.1.1 (Rev.1)), highlighting that the SC focused on key tasks assigned to it by CoP16 and also engaged in additional discussions under its own initiative. The CoP noted the report and forwarded the recommendations associated with it to Committee II.

ANIMALS COMMITTEE REPORT: Carolina Caceres (Canada) presented the AC report (CoP17 Doc.10.2.1) as her last task as AC Chair, Secretary-General Scanlon, echoed by the EU, expressed gratitude for her contributions. She highlighted progress made intersessionally, such as resolutions on Review of Significant Trade and Periodic Review of Appendices. She noted a joint proposal with the PC to review terms of reference of Committees, and recommended deferring further discussion to the agenda item on Rules of Procedure for CITES bodies. The CoP noted the report.

PLANTS COMMITTEE REPORT: Adrienne Sinclair (Canada), Acting Chair of the PC, presented the PC report (CoP17 Doc. 10.3.1) and summarized progress, highlighting new proposals on *Beaucarnea recurvata* and the genus *Dalbergia* and joint work with the AC on Periodic Review. Secretary-General Scanlon expressed gratitude for the contributions of former Chair Margarita Clemente and Vice-Chair Hesiquio Benitez. The EU echoed gratitude and noted the “invaluable contribution” of PC work on timber which, by addressing trade in single species, helps prevent overall habitat loss. SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS commended the report. The report was noted.

COOPERATION WITH ORGANIZATIONS AND MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS:

Cooperation with other biodiversity-related conventions: The SC Chair presented the report on cooperation with other biodiversity-related conventions (CoP17 Doc.14.1), highlighting the draft decision on exploring options consistent with the CITES Strategic Vision to strengthen cooperation, collaboration and synergies at all relevant levels. The EU commended the CITES/CMS Joint Work Programme on African Lions and expressed hope that it will be applied to other endangered species. The EU proposed to amend the draft decision to engage relevant biodiversity processes and to achieve synergies by gaining access

to GEF funding. SWITZERLAND drew attention to the elements for modular reporting against the Aichi Biodiversity Targets to ease reporting burden. The US expressed support for synergy with other biodiversity-related convention as long it adds value and funds are available for such partnerships. The CMS Secretariat assured that the CITES/CMS Joint Work Programme helped both Conventions to fulfill their core mandates. UNEP stressed the importance of biodiversity synergy at the national level. The CoP took note of contributions to the draft decision.

International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime:

The CITES Secretariat presented the report on International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC) (CoP17 Doc.14.2), updating Parties on activities undertaken by the ICCWC such as development of learning materials on anti-money laundering for a wildlife specific programme and the ICCWC Guidelines for forensic methods and procedures of ivory sampling and analysis. INTERPOL stressed the importance of building capacity from customs to the judiciary level in order to shut down criminal wildlife networks. The World Bank said ICCWC is a critical platform for ensuring legal trade flows and ending illegal trade flows in wildlife. The US offered to make available experts from its US Fish and Wildlife Service to Parties in need. CHILE highlighted a project on developing a field manual on institutional and personal training in wildlife trafficking. The CoP noted the document and adopted its draft decisions.

EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION: CITES AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT – REPORT OF THE YOUTH FORUM ON PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE:

Megan Reed, Youth delegate, US, introduced the relevant document (CoP17 Doc.20), noting the importance of engaging young people in conservation. SOUTH AFRICA acknowledged the need to strengthen the connections between youth and nature. Martha Nomaale, Youth delegate, South Africa, described what it means for African youth to be engaged in CITES and conservation.

The US introduced a draft resolution and decision for adoption, which was forwarded to the Secretariat and CoP for consideration, according to Rule 20 of the Rules of Procedure, as ISRAEL reminded. The CoP took note of the discussion.

IN THE CORRIDORS

If delegates come together to tackle the CITES CoP17 agenda with as much verve and enthusiasm as they brought to drumming during the opening ceremony, this gathering bodes well for wildlife. But after the music, dancing, and drumbeats died down, CoP delegates hit their first stumbling block in the Rules of Procedure: Parties remain divided on whether the EU should vote based on the number of its Member States, or based only on the number of Member States registered and accredited at a CoP. An in-session working group was established to quickly find a compromise before Plenary meets again on Sunday, and given the dense agenda ahead, time is of the essence. “Let’s spend our time discussing the fate of endangered species,” as one participant grumbled, “rather than discussing the Rules of Procedure.” Perhaps participants will be inspired by celebrations of Heritage Day in South Africa and the leaders who overcame apartheid to find the unity, strength and perseverance to overcome what may seem impossible.