

RAMSAR COP 10 HIGHLIGHTS WEDNESDAY 29, OCTOBER 2008

Ramsar COP 10 delegates met in plenary throughout the day to address organizational matters, and to hear reports on intersessional activities and statements by parties and observers. A special presentation on wetland conservation and sustainable use in the Republic of Korea was also made.

PLENARY

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: COP 9 President Maria Mutagamba, Minister of Water and Environment, Uganda, handed Anada Tiéga, Ramsar Executive Secretary, a guide book on the management of Ramsar sites prepared by her ministry.

Delegates adopted the agenda (COP 10 Doc.1 Rev.2) and rules of procedure (COP 10 Doc.2 Rev.1), after hearing that the rules had been amended to, amongst other things, provide for the election of an alternate president in addition to the president.

The COP then elected Lee Maanee, Minister of Environment, Republic of Korea, as COP 10 President. In his opening remarks, President Lee said the Convention's 158 contracting parties and more than 1800 Ramsar sites reflect the strong commitment of parties to the implementation of the Convention and reaffirms the importance and value of wetlands. He said the elaboration and adoption of a new strategic plan by COP 10 will usher in a new stage of the Convention's development, and that the conference will provide an opportunity to assess progress and renew determination for the future, and raise awareness about wetlands. Kim Chan-woo, Republic of Korea, was then elected Alternate President. Rejoice Mabudafhasi, South Africa, and Patrick Van Klaveren, Monaco, were elected Vice-Presidents.

The following were appointed to the Credentials Committee: for Africa, Manichand Puttoo (Mauritius); for Asia, Nirawan Pipitsombat (Thailand); for Europe, Camille Barnetche (France); for the Neotropics, Nancy Cespedes (Chile); for North America, Monika Herzig (Mexico); and for Oceania, Deborah Callister (Australia). Callister was also appointed Credentials Committee Chair, and David Pritchard was asked to serve as the Committee's Secretary.

The COP also agreed to establish a Committee on Finance and Budget to agree on the core budget proposals, chaired

by Herb Raffaele (US). The COP then agreed to admit the registered observers (COP10 Doc.39).

REPORTS: Report of the Chair of the Standing Committee: Standing Committee Chair Paul Mafabi gave an overview over the Committee's activities for the period 2006-2008 (COP 10 Doc.4). The Committee met five times to review the work of the Secretariat and its budgetary situation, and considered reports on work recommended by the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and the Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness Oversight Panel. The Committee also approved projects to be funded under the Ramsar Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use, the draft resolutions and the draft Changwon declaration for COP 10. Mafabi urged delegates to set a clear mandate and agenda for the Standing Committee during its next term, and to prioritize emerging issues, including a financial mechanism for the Convention, enhanced engagement with other multilateral environmental agreements, the need to address wetland conservation and wise use, and implementation capacity of parties. After several delegates commended the work of the Standing Committee, the report was adopted.

Report of the Chair of the Scientific and Technical Review Committee: Heather MacKay, the outgoing STRP Chair, briefed delegates on the Panel's work over the past triennium, highlighting issues and challenges relating to the Convention's implementation and emerging areas and options for future work. She supported addressing issues concerning water, wetlands, biodiversity and climate change as a package rather than as stand alone issues. MacKay also discussed regional networks for national focal points (NFPs) and advocated expanding capacity-building efforts for NFPs. In the ensuing discussion ALGERIA, INDIA, EGYPT and AUSTRALIA supported a review of guidelines for Ramsar sites by the STRP, with AUSTRALIA calling for clarity regarding utilizing the Montreaux listing procedure for threatened Ramsar sites. VENEZUELA requested the removal of one of its Ramsar sites from the Montreaux list, since issues relating to tourist development had been addressed. She also highlighted the need for an expert to address wetlands and urbanization.

MAURITIUS, EGYPT and INDIA supported more scientific work on avian influenza. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA expressed hope that in-depth research on scientific and

technical issues proposed by the STRP would be conducted. Delegates adopted the report of the STRP.

Report on the World Wetlands NGO Conference: Park In-ja, on behalf of the participants of the World Wetlands NGO Conference, held prior to COP 10, presented the Suncheon NGO Declaration, noting the formation of a World Wetland Network to facilitate and enhance information sharing and transfer of best practices in wetlands management. She urged parties to organize national wetland committees comprised of all relevant stakeholders, and called for enhanced cooperation between parties, International Organization Partners, NGOs, and local and indigenous people. She called for a new resolution to protect and restore sites eligible for designation as Ramsar sites, but not yet recognized by national governments, and proposed establishing an International Wetlands Restoration Award. She also noted the need for conserving wetland sustainability while respecting local customs, and drew attention to draft resolutions on, *inter alia*, human health, poverty reduction, enhancing biodiversity in rice paddies and biofuels.

Report of the Secretary General: Anada Tiéga, Ramsar Secretary General, provided an overview of the implementation of the Convention at the global level during the past triennium (COP10 Doc.6). He noted that there are now 158 contracting parties, and 1802 Ramsar sites covering 168 million hectares. He stressed increasing recognition of the role of wetlands in conservation and sustainable development, particularly relating to biodiversity, climate change, food security, energy, extractive industries, human health, urbanization and water supply. He highlighted management and organizational challenges, scientific and technical challenges, and emerging challenges regarding Ramsar implementation.

Tiéga also stressed the importance of: improving the image and understanding of the Convention; integrating wetlands into national and international planning; enhancing Secretariat capacity; and increasing funding for the COP. He discussed work with relevant organizations on new concepts and approaches, such as carbon sequestration and payment for ecosystem services. He highlighted regional and global calls for action to save invaluable wetlands, stressing partnerships in wetland management with key players at local, national and international levels.

In response to the Secretary General's report, many parties provided accounts of implementation at the national level and the designation of wetlands as Ramsar sites, and highlighted issues of concern or interest in the report. BRAZIL said the report provides a biased view on biofuels. BRAZIL and ARGENTINA noted that priority setting is the prerogative of parties, while recognizing the Secretary General's advisory role, with ARGENTINA recalling that the IV Pan-American Regional Meeting in 2007 agreed on regional priorities. BRAZIL, PARAGUAY and CUBA requested that the Secretary General's report reflect the meeting's outcomes.

Regarding site listings, CHINA noted that six new Ramsar sites are not included in the respective report (COP 10 Doc.7), and that human-induced negative changes in the Dalai Lake Reserve reported by the Secretary General have been mitigated. AUSTRIA called for augmenting Secretariat staffing capacity due to increased membership and the growing number of Ramsar sites and COP resolutions. EGYPT emphasized the need for: monitoring activities, including the organization of regional meetings; resolving the legal status of the Secretariat;

and drawing upon codified practices and lessons on cultural heritage and wetlands in the Mediterranean. EGYPT and IRAQ urged addressing the language barrier for Arab parties, with IRAQ requesting that Ramsar services and information products be made available in Arabic.

CHILE supported linkages between climate change and wetlands. MALAWI supported a regional forum for a network of wetlands managers. JAPAN cautioned against any budgetary increases alluded to in the Secretary General's report. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA announced its intention to establish the Ramsar East Asian Network on wetlands conservation and to provide necessary funding. KENYA supported expansion of Ramsar sites.

TANZANIA proposed enhancing synergies between the Ramsar Convention and the CBD, as well as involving other global initiatives such as the World Water Forum and the FAO. Drawing attention to the COP's theme "Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People," she emphasized linking climate change and wetlands, also observing that 80 percent of diseases reported to the World Health Organization are environment related. WWF called on the COP to encourage parties to use the Montreaux Record to indicate sites that have undergone or may experience adverse changes in ecological character.

The Secretary General's report was adopted after clarifications provided by Anada Tiéga.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION ON WETLAND CONSERVATION AND USE IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA: Suk Tae Hwang, Ministry of Environment, delivered a presentation on wetland conservation and sustainable use in the Republic of Korea. He noted that 7.7 percent of the Republic of Korea's land mass is covered by wetlands including 11 designated Ramsar sites. On post-COP 10 priorities, he emphasized: setting up a National Wetland Inventory by 2012 and an East Asia Ramsar Wetland Centre; enhancing cooperation with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; and implementing the Green Growth policy. The presentation closed with a video on wetland conservation in the Republic of Korea.

IN THE CORRIDORS

After a lively opening ceremony with cultural performances, followed by a dinner on Tuesday evening, COP 10 got down to business on Wednesday. As the day progressed, more and more delegates identified the issues most dear to them, expressing a sense of urgency on some while revealing divergent views on others. Many developing country delegates pointed to the issue of extractive industries as the most imminent threat to their wetlands, with one delegate, in particular, calling for immediate action to protect wetlands against the pressures for profitable resource extraction. Expressing exasperation, he said "The very survival of our wetlands is at stake."

Other issues raised included climate change and its interlinkages with wetland conservation and wise use. While most delegates agreed on the need for a holistic approach to water, biodiversity and climate change that would raise the profile of wetlands in climate change mitigation and adaptation, others pointed to the divisive issue of biofuels. One delegate quipped that "we are sure to see a lot of disagreement" on this "not so wise use" of wetlands. As many parties expressed interest in additional capacity-building or implementation support activities like regional coverage, some anticipated bumpy budget negotiations.