

RAMSAR COP 11 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 9 JULY 2012

COP 11 met in plenary throughout the day. The day commenced with a special presentation on sustainable tourism and the value of wetlands. The plenary then continued consideration of the draft resolutions and recommendations submitted by parties and the Standing Committee (SC), including the draft resolutions on: institutional hosting of the Secretariat; regional initiatives 2013-2015 in the framework of the Ramsar Convention; partnerships and synergies with multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and other institutions; tourism and wetlands; and climate change and wetlands.

PLENARY

SPECIAL PRESENTATION ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND THE VALUE OF WETLANDS: Taleb Rifai, Secretary General, World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), gave a presentation on the linkages between tourism and wetlands, announcing today's launch of the publication "Destination Wetlands - Supporting Sustainable Tourism," a collaborative effort of the UNWTO and the Ramsar Secretariat.

Referring to the current "travel revolution," Rifai underscored the importance and size of the tourism industry worldwide, which has both positive and negative impacts. Saying travel is increasingly viewed as a human need, and perhaps even a human right, he reflected on the attention the Rio+20 outcome document, "The Future We Want," paid to sustainable tourism. He highlighted the importance of sustainable tourism and its potential to contribute to a green economy and poverty eradication, stressing wetlands must be seen as an asset.

BRAZIL proposed focusing on the contribution of sustainable tourism to wetlands. INDIA preferred differentiating between commercial and ecotourism, noting that commercial tourism may negatively affect wetland sites. MAURITANIA highlighted the potential of wetlands as tourism sites. IRAN stressed the need to engage local and indigenous people in wetland conservation, with CORPORACIÓN MONTAÑAS COLOMBIA also underlining the needs of local populations.

CONSIDERATION OF THE DRAFT RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Institutional Hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat: In the morning, COP 11 President Mihail Făcăș apologized for communication problems with parties over the previous day's indicative vote. He opened the floor to parties who had not yet given interventions on this item (COP11 DR.1 and Doc.17). VENEZUELA, on behalf of Cuba, Ecuador and Nicaragua, expressed dissatisfaction with the procedure of Sunday's indicative vote.

GREECE, SWEDEN, SPAIN, AZERBAIJAN, SLOVAKIA, CYPRUS, the UK, PAKISTAN, LESOTHO, CROATIA, HUNGARY, SRI LANKA, NIGERIA, ICELAND, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA, JAMAICA, POLAND, GEORGIA, PORTUGAL, NEPAL, MOLDOVA, SAMOA, BAHAMAS,

SAINT LUCIA, LATVIA, the MARSHALL ISLANDS and MALI supported maintaining the *status quo*, with IUCN remaining the Secretariat's host, citing, *inter alia*, the considerable investment of time and energy involved in moving to a new institutional host.

The UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, LESOTHO, IRAQ, LIBYA, SUDAN, LEBANON, YEMEN and JORDAN also preferred that IUCN remain the institutional host, but requested the inclusion of Arabic as an official language in the Convention. FIJI preferred IUCN, questioning whether UNEP would support an Oceania regional office. The NETHERLANDS supported staying with IUCN until a World Environment Organization is established under UNEP, at which point a transfer could be considered. SENEGAL supported staying with IUCN but suggested exploring practical ways to implement a ministerial segment.

CHILE, ZAMBIA, MALAWI, TANZANIA, the CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, NAMIBIA, the SEYCHELLES, CAMEROON, KENYA, COMOROS, DJIBOUTI, HONDURAS, CAPE VERDE, EL SALVADOR, ECUADOR and NICARAGUA acknowledged the support and hard work of IUCN, but supported a Secretariat move to UNEP, citing, *inter alia*, increased international visibility and enhanced opportunities for synergy with other MEAs.

GUATEMALA, CHINA, CONGO, the PHILIPPINES, GRENADA, GUINEA-BISSAU, GERMANY, MAURITIUS and LAOS maintained open positions, with some parties urging for a consensus decision.

COP 11 President Făcăș said the Conference and Standing Committees would consider how to proceed.

Regional Initiatives 2013-2015 in the Framework of the Ramsar Convention: In the morning, Tobias Salathé, Ramsar Secretariat, introduced this item (COP11 DR.5 and COP11 Doc.13), noting that the draft resolution proposes continuing current procedures, in particular: use of adopted 2009-2012 Operational Guidelines for regional initiatives; annual reporting and submission of work plans to the SC; and SC annual assessment of regional initiative compliance with the Operational Guidelines.

In the afternoon, 22 delegations intervened in support of the draft resolution. However, delegates were divided about supporting a temporary moratorium on new regional initiatives for 2013-2015.

FRANCE, for EU Member States present at COP 11 and Croatia, AUSTRALIA and SWITZERLAND supported the moratorium, with FRANCE stating that this would allow consolidation of existing regional initiatives. COLOMBIA, CHINA, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, CUBA, COSTA RICA, BRAZIL, JAMAICA and GUATEMALA opposed.

ARGENTINA and JAMAICA requested deletion of independent evaluations of regional initiatives. SWITZERLAND requested clarification on who would carry out the evaluations, while AUSTRALIA supported the independent evaluations and SENEGAL said the Secretariat should perform them.

With reference to Doc.13, ARGENTINA said requiring regional initiatives to have independent financial systems is not part of the Operational Guidelines. Ramsar Secretary General Anada Tiéga responded that these requirements should be seen as a constructive way to increase the capacity of regional initiatives to raise funds and ensure their sustainability.

Partnerships and Synergies with MEAs and Other Institutions: Deputy Secretary General Nick Davidson introduced this item (COP11 DR.6 Rev.1 and Doc.s 7, 18, 19, 20 and 36), explaining that the main changes in the revised draft resolution refer to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

SENEGAL suggested including reference to regional and sub-regional organizations in enhancing the regional role of the Convention. DENMARK, for the EU Member States present at COP 11 and Croatia, proposed, *inter alia*, including reference to the resolutions of the fifth Meeting of the Parties to the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) on collaboration between AWEA and Ramsar.

BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL, for the International Organization Partners (IOPs), supported by SWITZERLAND and opposed by CHINA, proposed welcoming the role of the IOPs in reporting on the effectiveness of the Convention. ARGENTINA suggested referring to Resolution X.12 (Principles for Partnerships between the Ramsar Convention and the Business Sector), calling for party involvement when activities take place in their territory.

BRAZIL underscored the importance of avoiding the duplication of efforts with other instruments, especially the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). SWITZERLAND proposed including reference to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes in welcoming further cooperative relationships of Ramsar.

COLOMBIA proposed a midterm evaluation of the contributions of Ramsar's collaboration with other instruments to the implementation of the Convention's Strategic Plan. SOUTH AFRICA proposed the Secretariat and STRP explore further ways to participate in IPBES.

The Secretariat announced that it would develop a Rev.2 for further consideration.

Tourism and Wetlands: Ramsar Secretary General Tiéga introduced the item (COP11 DR.7) emphasizing: the relevance of tourism to "wise use;" beaches as a wetland category; and the potential to expand the Ramsar community through collaboration on tourism.

AUSTRIA, for the EU Member States present at COP 11 and Croatia, proposed enlarging the scope of the resolution to include recreation. Supported by DENMARK, he requested harmonization with relevant language in the Rio+20 outcome document and highlighted work done under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on sustainable tourism guidelines. DENMARK requested referencing indigenous peoples.

In addition to participation of local communities, MAURITANIA proposed mentioning "public-private partnerships." WWF, also for Wetlands International, supported by COLOMBIA, proposed mentioning water in addition to land-use planning sectors. INDIA proposed developing guidelines for maintaining social and cultural values, and involving local communities in decision-making processes.

BRAZIL, with PANAMA, noted that the UNWTO's definition employed in the text addresses the sustainability of tourism as an economic activity, and proposed employing the CBD definition. Deputy Secretary General Davidson said both definitions could be referred to, with the qualifier "as appropriate."

MALAYSIA proposed a reference to "relevant stakeholders," asserting that stakeholders who directly or indirectly cause degradation must take equal responsibility and work with parties to restore wetlands.

SOUTH AFRICA proposed references to: facilitating dialogue; empowerment of local communities in tourism decision making; zoning systems; fair and equitable resources

from sustainable tourism income; and management of tourism impacts. COLOMBIA proposed strengthening the resolution with statements about conservation and management of ecosystems, and mentioning "provision of tourism services" in order to encourage local community participation.

The PHILIPPINES called for promoting jobs and livelihoods, and ensuring equitable benefit sharing, for local communities. CONGO expressed concern over lack of implementation of the "equitable sharing" aspect of the CBD, and proposed text on "the necessary regulatory basis for equitable sharing of benefits."

THAILAND said that a framework and guidelines for compensating wetland losses could help prevent negative impacts of commercial tourism activities. ARGENTINA proposed replacing a reference to the green economy with "sustainable development," saying the concept of green economy is not yet clearly defined. IRAN supported sharing of knowledge and technical cooperation.

MEXICO highlighted the need to develop methodologies to determine the water needs of wetlands, and proposed a specific recommendation be developed for COP 12 on ecological flows. CHINA stressed that maintaining human health should take priority. PANAMA requested deletion of "essential" in reference to ecological processes.

Climate Change and Wetlands: Max Finlayson, Ramsar Secretariat, introduced this item (COP11 DR.14 and Doc.32), noting that it builds on Resolution X.24 including, *inter alia*, on: REDD+; collaboration with other organizations; vulnerability assessments; adaptation and mitigation; and maintaining the ecological character of wetlands.

JAPAN, MEXICO, SOUTH AFRICA, LIBYA, SWITZERLAND, INDIA and JAMAICA supported the draft resolution but said they would submit textual amendments in writing. The PHILIPPINES requested additional text on risk reduction. BRAZIL and COLOMBIA called for language consistent with the UNFCCC. CANADA and the US cautioned against duplication of efforts with the UNFCCC, and CANADA suggested a reference to social vulnerability. NORWAY stressed the importance of referencing REDD+ in the resolution.

AUSTRALIA called for text on building resilience in wetlands. AUSTRIA, for EU Member States present at COP11 and Croatia, requested text, *inter alia*, on awareness of wetlands degradation and the need for parties to improve, not just maintain, the ecological character of wetlands. ARGENTINA requested text on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and the deletion of references to "wet carbon" and "blue carbon." THAILAND stressed the important role of wetlands in mitigation.

A contact group was established to continue discussions on this issue.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Delegates arrived at the Palace of the Parliament in the morning to continue debate about the institutional host of the Ramsar Secretariat. One delegate compared the "political turmoil in Romania, taking place just down the hall," over the suspension of the Romanian President by the Romanian Parliament, to "discontent from the plenary floor" about the informal voting process that took place on Sunday. Some characterized the indicative vote as "untransparent and contrary to the spirit of consensus."

Meanwhile, the number of more difficult decisions continued to rise, with delegates divided on the issue of REDD+ in the draft resolution on climate change and wetlands. The Secretariat found a room available "all day tomorrow if necessary" for a contact group to reach consensus. A delegate, looking back at REDD+ discussions at the COP of another biodiversity-related Convention, wondered whether one day would be enough.

With the announcement that the issue of institutional hosting would likely be considered in plenary again on Tuesday, some delegates openly worried that the plenary would struggle with addressing the rest of the draft resolutions, totaling 14, before their self-imposed deadline of Tuesday evening, while others were concerned that controversial issues in draft resolutions already opened would not receive the attention necessary to resolve them.