

CITES COP16 HIGHLIGHTS: SUNDAY, 3 MARCH 20013

The sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP16) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) convened in the morning in Bangkok, Thailand. Yingluck Shinawatra, Prime Minister, Thailand, officially opened the meeting. She highlighted Thailand's commitment to the Convention and to enhancing cooperation in conservation and combating illegal trade. John Scanlon, CITES Secretary-General, welcomed over 2000 registered participants from over 150 countries, including more than 200 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and intergovernmental organizations.

In the afternoon, the CoP addressed possible changes to the Rules of Procedure, among different administrative and strategic matters. Noting the lack of consensus on the issue, the Chair deferred further discussions to a later date.

OPENING OF THE MEETING

The host country organizers of CITES CoP16 welcomed participants to Thailand, and informed them of the commitment of the host country and its Royal family to the conservation of the environment and wildlife.

Addressing participants via video, His Royal Highness Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, underscored threats to wildlife, including illegal killing of African elephants and rhinos and related illegal trade in ivory, and called on parties to work together to address them.

In his opening statement, Øystein Størkersen, Chair of the Standing Committee (SC), recognized that this CoP marks the 40th anniversary of CITES. He lauded its achievements, but cautioned that parties "cannot be complacent" and must continue to work to implement the Convention. Calling attention to the role of local communities and civil society in the "constantly-evolving dialogue" of CITES, he encouraged further exploration of synergies with a "multitude of partners" for finance and programming.

Achim Steiner, Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), commended CITES on its 40 years of vision and energy. He recommended addressing: cross-border crime syndicates, enforcement and supply chain challenges affecting elephant and rhino populations; the need for synergies between CITES and other instruments to protect shark and ray species; and defining and measuring targets.

John Scanlon, Secretary-General, CITES, welcomed Bahrain, the Maldives and Lebanon as the three newest parties to CITES, which now has 178 parties. He said illegal trade has reached

a level that poses danger to wildlife, economies, stability and people, including those serving on the frontlines to protect wildlife. He called upon parties to take action to: reverse negative trends; address wildlife crime; ensure legal, sustainable and traceable trade of economically-valuable timber species; address introduction from the sea; and request the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to serve as a financial mechanism to CITES.

Yingluck Shinawatra, Prime Minister, Thailand, emphasized Thailand's efforts to reduce illegal trafficking of ivory by increasing international customs cooperation, limiting the supply of ivory products to domestic elephants and amending national legislation to put an end to ivory trade.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

ELECTION OF OFFICERS: In the afternoon, the CoP appointed: Preecha Rengsomboonsuk, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment (Thailand) as CoP Chair and Pithaya Pookaman, vice- Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Ministry (Thailand), as alternate; Augustin Ngumbi Amuri (Democratic Republic of Congo) as vice-Chair and Øystein Størkersen (Norway) as alternate; Carolina Caceres (Canada) as Chair of Committee I; Robert Gable (US) as Chair of Committee II; and Zhihua Zhou (China) as Chair of the Credentials Committee.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND WORK

PROGRAMME: Chair Rengsomboonsuk welcomed all delegates. Alternate Chair Pookaman then introduced the working programme (CoP16 Doc.3 (Rev.2)). The Secretariat proposed a minor change, wherein item 13 on cooperation with organizations and multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and item 15 on the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) be transferred to Committee II and discussed together with item 14 on the draft resolution and decisions on the cooperation of CITES with other biodiversity-related conventions. The CoP adopted the document with the amendment.

RULES OF PROCEDURE: The alternate Chair addressed the timeline for discussing the three documents on Rules of Procedure, namely the Report of the Secretariat (CoP16 Doc.4.1 (Rev.1)), the proposal to improve transparency of voting during meetings of the CoP (CoP16 Doc.4.2 (Rev.1)) and the proposed amendment to Rule 25 on methods of voting – use of secret ballots (CoP16 Doc.4.3 (Rev.1)). He proposed that a simple majority be used for amending the Rules of Procedure.



GUINEA and JAPAN said that decisions should be made based on a two-thirds majority. EGYPT, citing the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), where decisions are taken by consensus, noted that secret ballots are not a question of procedure but of substance. Supported by CHINA, SOUTH AFRICA, GHANA, IRAN, the PHILIPPINES and KUWAIT, he objected to the proposal to use a simple majority, and stated that consensus is a better option. IRELAND, on behalf of the EU and its Member States and Croatia, and supported by MEXICO, stressed that decisions must be made on the basis of a simple majority, as described in the Rules of Procedure. COLOMBIA, ARGENTINA, ECUADOR, BRAZIL and the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO agreed with the EU and MEXICO.

Secretary-General Scanlon noted that the CBD and other conventions that use consensus, have the use of consensus specifically laid out in their rules, which he said is not the case for CITES.

Report of the Secretariat: The Secretariat introduced its Report (CoP16 Doc.4.1 (Rev.1)) along with proposed amendments to references to draft decisions, the deadline for submission of working documents and voting. It withdrew its proposed amendment to procedures for deciding on proposals for amendment of Appendices I and II. Delegates agreed to the recommendations after the Secretariat withdrew the proposed deadline change for submitting working documents and made a minor wording change, suggested by ISRAEL, to the proposed amendment on voting.

Proposal to improve transparency of voting during meetings of the CoP and Proposed amendment to Rule 25 on Methods of voting – Use of secret ballots: The Alternate Chair invited the proponents of the two proposals on voting procedures to introduce the documents, followed by discussions on both proposals.

IRELAND, on behalf of the EU and its Member States and Croatia, introduced a proposal from Denmark on behalf of the EU to improve transparency of voting during meetings of the CoP (CoP16 Doc. 4.2 (Rev.1)). He explained the intent of the proposal, stating the increased use of secret ballots in non-administrative matters had become the rule for many issues, rather than the exception, and said this practice threatened the transparency of decision-making in the Convention.

MEXICO introduced its proposal with Chile on a proposed amendment to Rule 25 on methods of voting (CoP16 Doc 4.3 (Rev.1)). He noted that the use of secret ballots had increased since CoP9 in 1994, when Rule 25 had been changed from requiring a simple majority to requiring the support of 10 countries. He said the 10-party threshold does not reflect the increase in the number of parties to CITES since CoP9.

In discussions, INDIA supported the EU proposal. The US and COLOMBIA supported the EU proposal, noting that if it was not approved, they could support the proposal from Mexico and Chile. Commenting that secret ballots should remain an option but should not be the rule, PARAGUAY also supported Mexico and Chile.

JAPAN stated that secret ballots allow states to vote freely and opposed changes to the voting threshold. He challenged the view that secret ballots were used too frequently, commenting that since CoP10, over 70% of votes had been conducted openly, and that parties had maintained a balance between transparency and democracy.

CHINA agreed that secret ballots are important for democracy, stating that the current CITES system strikes a good balance with transparency.

Noting the lack of consensus on the issue, the Chair deferred further discussions to a later date, following the meeting of the Credentials Committee.

ESTABLISHMENT OF CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE: Øystein Størkersen, SC Chair, reported that SC63 had nominated a chair and four members for the Credentials Committee. The CoP approved these nominations.

ADMISSION OF OBSERVERS: The Secretariat introduced the agenda item (CoP16 Doc.6), which the CoP accepted without amendment.

REPORT OF UNEP: UNEP introduced its report (CoP16 Doc.7) and highlighted substantial and technical support provided to CITES. She recommended amending the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between CITES and UNEP in light of lessons learned over the last sixteen months. The CoP took note of the report.

STRATEGIC MATTERS

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT: Øystein Størkersen, SC Chair, introduced the SC report (CoP16 Doc.10.1.1), highlighting that, in the period since CoP15, the Committee focused on key tasks given to it by the CoP. The US said that the item on the SC's agreement on specific actions on mahogany is not reflected in the SC Report and asked that it be noted. UGANDA pointed out that reference to the review of Resolution 10.10 was left out. The CoP noted the Report.

ANIMALS COMMITTEE REPORT: Carlos Ibero Solana (Spain), Chair, Animals Committee (AC) presented the AC report (CoP16 Doc.10.2.1 (Rev.1)). He highlighted topics considered at the joint meeting of the AC and PC. The US encouraged further discussion on a supplementary budget to support the work of the technical committees and suggested the SC finance and budget subcommittee consider this intersessionally. The report was noted.

PLANTS COMMITTEE REPORT: Plants Committee (PC) Chair Margarita Clemente-Muñoz (Spain) presented the PC report (CoP16 Doc.10.3.1 (Rev.1)), outlining the work achieved at meetings of the PC from 2009-2012, the joint AC/PC meeting and various related regional and working group meetings. The report was noted.

WORLD WILDLIFE DAY: The Secretariat introduced the proposal by Thailand for World Wildlife Day (CoP16 Doc.24 (Rev.1)). JAPAN, EGYPT, GUINEA, KENYA, the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, CHINA, INDIA, VENEZUELA, PERU and the US supported it, and the CoP adopted it.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The CoP opened with a stunning music-and-dance performance followed by a speech by Thailand's Prime Minister Shinawatra. One participant approved of the Prime Minister's between-the-lines suggestion that a ban on domestic ivory trade could help resolve the ivory crisis. After lunch, delegates tackled controversial proposed amendments to the Rules of Procedure concerning voting by secret ballot. By mid-way through the afternoon, the excitement that had flickered in the morning disappeared along with the internet connection, which was already intermittent, as divisiveness flared for the first, but likely not the last, time at CoP16.