

CITES CoP19 Highlights: Monday, 14 November 2022

The nineteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP19) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) convened in the morning in Panama City, Panama. Warmly welcoming participants, Milciades Concepción, Minister of Environment of Panama, expressed his country's pride at hosting CoP19, which he called the "CoP of the Americas," noting CITES had not met for a CoP in the region in 20 years. He recalled the need to ensure that initiatives and conventions coordinate between themselves to preserve both biodiversity and humanity. He noted Panama's work in conservation and the protection of biodiversity, including recently expanding marine protected areas and passing a law recognizing the rights of nature. He stressed that the implementation of CITES is beneficial not only to the planet, but also to humanity. Noting the tendency to consider humanity separate from nature, Sonja Leighton-Kone, Acting Deputy Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), stressed that the biodiversity and extinction crises are consequences of "an extractive mindset." She said that, done well, global trade can incentivize ecosystem conservation, but that sustainable use requires consent, community buy-in, the rule of law, and multilateralism.

CoP19 participants addressed administrative and procedural issues. In the afternoon they reconvened in regional groups to prepare for the long deliberations to come in Committee I and II of the CoP.

Opening of the Meeting

Ivonne Higuero, Secretary-General, CITES, expressed her gratitude to the Panamanian government for their welcome and aid. Noting that it was "fitting" that the CoP took place in the same period as other meetings on wetlands, biodiversity, and climate change, she stressed that "the stakes are high" for delegates. Among crucial issues to be discussed, she highlighted the 52 amendment proposals, issues of representation and engagement with Indigenous peoples, as well the relations between wildlife crime and habitat degradation and increased risks of exposures to zoonoses. She pointed to the need for innovation and as-yet unexplored sources of funding, including from private investors.

José Gabriel Carrizo, Vice President of Panama, on behalf of President Laurentino Cortizo, welcomed delegates to his country, noting that it is one of only three carbon negative nations in the world. He highlighted the importance of biodiversity on the

Panamanian isthmus and efforts to protect it through CITES and other mechanisms. After he declared CoP19 officially open, delegates enjoyed a series of song, video, and dance performances showcasing the natural and cultural splendors of Panama.

Administrative and Financial Matters

Election of Chair, Alternate Chair and Vice-Chairs of the meeting and of Chairs of Committees I and II: The CoP elected Milciades Concepción (Panama) as Chair; Shirley Binder (Panama) as Alternate Chair; Patience Gandiwa (Zimbabwe) and May Shih Anna Wong (Singapore) as Vice Chairs; Vincent Fleming (UK) as Chair of Committee I; Rhedyn Ollerenshaw (Australia) as Chair of Committee II; and Hayat Mesbah (Morocco) as Chair of the Credentials Committee.

Adoption of the Agenda and Working Programme: The Secretariat introduced the agenda (CoP19 Doc.2), which was adopted. The Secretariat introduced the work programme (CoP19 Doc.3) and noted two planned evening sessions. The CoP adopted the work programme with minor amendments.

Rules of Procedure: Proposed amendment to Rules 25.5 and 6 and 7.2a: SC Chair Carolina Caceres introduced amendments (CoP19 Doc 4.1 and 2) to Rules of Procedure 25.5 and 6, to specify that amendments to reduce the scope of a species proposal are decided prior to deciding on the proposal itself, and to Rule 7.2a on the composition of the Credentials Committee.

The UNITED STATES joined by ISRAEL supported the adoption of all amendments to Rules 25.5 and 6 and to Rule 7.2a, noting that the guidance produced by the working group is clear and will help protect the species.

INDONESIA, joined by BOTSWANA, CHINA, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, ARGENTINA, BRAZIL, JAPAN, COLOMBIA, SOUTH AFRICA, ALGERIA, and RUSSIAN FEDERATION, objected to the amendment proposed to Rule 25.6 while supporting amendments to Rule 25.5 and 7.2 a. The EU and CANADA supported amendments to Rule 25.5 and 6 and Rule 7.2a, while noting that amendments lacked consensus.

Following discussions, the SC Chair emphasized that agreement on amendments to Rule 7.2a and 25.5 existed among parties, and deferred discussion on amendments to Rule 25.6 to later plenary sessions. CoP19 agreed.

Proposed Amendment to Rule 26: Zimbabwe introduced the relevant report (CoP19 Doc. 4.2), suggesting adjustments to Rule 26 on the right to vote to take account of the key roles played by some Parties in the conservation of endangered species and the burden stemming from their conservation. BOTSWANA,

INDONESIA, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, and TANZANIA supported the proposal. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA objected to the proposal, emphasizing everyone should bear equal responsibilities. COTE D'IVOIRE, BENIN, GABON, and ARGENTINA objected, underscoring the difficulty of implementing the proposal. The EU objected, noting that the proposed change would fundamentally alter voting rights.

SOUTH AFRICA raised a point of order, blocking the CoP's decision to reject the proposal. The CoP Chair underscored that changes to Rule 26 did not have enough support but agreed to defer decision to allow informal discussion on the matter.

Strategic Matters

Committee reports and recommendations: Credentials

Committee: The Secretariat shared the nominations to the Committee, including representatives from United States, Tonga, and Finland.

Admission of Observers: The Secretariat introduced CoP19 Doc.6 on the admission of observers, seeking acceptance of observers listed in the document and orally. The CoP adopted the document.

In the Corridors

It has been twenty years since a CITES CoP took place in the Americas. Delegates arrived at the venue to a welcoming chorus of children and birds, a fitting reminder of what is at stake in these negotiations. In the opening ceremony of the plenary, jaguar stamped their feet in time to music; traditional dancers swooped and swirled around each other, raising hats and swishing skirts in welcome; and a moving song channeled the voice of nature, urging delegates to make the right choice and protect biodiversity. "This is going to be a packed meeting," one seasoned delegate reflected under the hot Panamanian sun. Many of the proposals tabled concern marine species and reptiles endemic to the region, all species severely affected by illegal and unregulated trade. Several participants expressed confidence that many of these proposals would be successful. Other proposals seemed more tenuous. "I'm afraid the hippopotamus and *Paubrasilia echinata* will turn out to be trouble," another participant opined as delegates broke early into regional groups to prepare for the intense deliberations ahead in Committee I and II. "But it is the first day—let's not stress ourselves too much ahead of time." Listening in near the entrance, the tanagers and parrots seemed to agree.



Follow daily coverage and photos
of negotiations from the world's
trusted neutral reporting service



enb.iisd.org



subscribe at bit.ly/enbupdate



@IISD_ENB



facebook.com/IISD.ENB

