

**PROPOSAL SUBMITTED BY MEXICO ON SEEDS OF MEXICAN CACTACEAE
LISTED IN APPENDIX II**

11th Plants Committee Meeting, (PC11), to be held in Malaysia in September, 2001

Document prepared by the Scientific, Management and Law Enforcement Authorities of Mexico

Representatives of the Management and Scientific Authorities of Mexico for CITES, as well as academic experts interested in the study and conservation of Mexican cacti, met to analyze the current situation in Mexico with respect to this country's proposal and commitments related to listing seeds of Mexican cacti in Appendix II. The conclusion resulting from this meeting was that it would be very difficult for Mexico to fulfill these commitments. Nevertheless, it is currently considered essential for the seeds of this group to remain in Appendix II, in order to protect their populations. In this sense, we request the support and understanding of the Plants Committee, on the basis of the reasons that have led us to make this decision, which we shall explain in the next part of this document.

1. Mexico proposed listing seeds of Mexican cacti in CITES Appendix II as a way to counteract the high level of illicit exports of seeds from this group.
2. Mexico does not have the capacity to supply the short or medium term demand for seeds. Mexican nurseries cannot produce seeds and plants for export.
3. Mexico has many urgent problems related to cactaceae that need to be solved before embarking upon a program of cactus propagation in order to satisfy international demand. The most pressing problems are as much of a biological nature as of a socio-economic character.
4. The biological problems or risks we consider most important based on the results of ongoing research projects are as follows:
 - i. There is a lack of knowledge on the population status of over 90% of Mexico's cacti, especially with respect to their regeneration and establishment rates. *Given this lack of information, allowing or facilitating harvest of wild seeds does not seem to be an appropriate decision.*
 - ii. As far as we know, and from what we are able to observe in the field, we conclude that with many cactus species the probability of seeds actually taking root is very low. *Given this situation, allowing or facilitating harvest of wild seeds does not seem to be an appropriate decision.*
 - iii. The level of wild seed harvest is high, which has had a negative impact on the populations of many cactus species, as well as on the animals that feed on seed pulp. These animals are, in turn, the ones that disperse the seeds (only in a well-studied region called "Tehuacan Valley," 32 species of birds and bats have been registered which feed on columnar cacti). *In this sense, allowing and/or facilitating wild seed harvest endangers an important number of bird and bat species that consume the fruit, but not the seeds, which would result in a decrease in the regeneration rate for most cactus species.*
 - iv. It is calculated that around 80 % of the cactaceae family can only be reproduced by seeds, so vegetative reproduction does not occur as commonly as is generally stated. *Therefore, we consider that allowing and/or facilitating seed harvest would seriously affect the regeneration of many species. This is especially important because many population studies show that regeneration is one of the most critical stages of cactus life cycles, and any alteration at this stage may put the species in danger of extinction.*
 - v. A considerable number of cactus seeds are viviparous, so harvesting them implies the destruction and death of the plants. *Given this situation, allowing or facilitating harvest of seeds from the wild does not seem to be an appropriate decision.*
- b. The most urgent problems of a socio-economic nature are:
 - i. Mexico is undergoing an accelerated change in land use throughout practically the entire territory of the country. This involves very complicated problems in monitoring and periodic follow-up on cactus populations. *Given this situation, allowing or facilitating seed harvest from the wild does not seem to be the proper decision.*

- ii. Cacti are to be found in some of the poorest regions in the country, and the harvest of seeds from the wild is an activity that provides income for rural communities. *If seed harvesting is facilitated or allowed for these rural communities, pillage will surely increase sharply.*
- iii. Cacti are a source of materials for food, construction and fuel in rural communities. *Facilitating or allowing seed harvesting will lead to a population decrease in terms of density and frequency rates. This could result in a significant reduction or total loss of these primary resources for the rural communities.*

In summary, although we realize that Mexico cannot fulfill the commitments it had made, it is considered that cactus seeds should stay in Appendix II, as a protective measure for these species. It is also considered that one of the most serious problems and risks facing this group of plants continues to be the illicit seed trade. Therefore, it is essential to protect them in Appendix II, as it is impossible to provide enough seeds from propagated stock.