

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES  
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA

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Thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties  
Bangkok (Thailand), 2-14 October 2004

First session: 2 October 2004: 15h30-16h30

Secretariat: W. Wijnstekers

UNEP: K. Töpfer

Rapporteurs: J. Caldwell  
M. Jenkins  
R. Mackenzie

### **Welcoming addresses and opening of the meeting**

The Minister for Natural Resources and Environment, H.E. Mr Suwit Khunkitti, welcomed delegates to Thailand and to the Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre, noting Her Majesty Queen Sirikit's personal commitment to conservation of wild fauna and flora. He pointed out that all 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) were now Parties to CITES and had made significant efforts to promote conservation and sustainable use of wild species, while meeting the challenges of rapid economic growth and integration. He noted that, to improve implementation of the Convention, Thailand had conducted public awareness activities and training programmes, and had recently reviewed its Wildlife Protection Act. The Minister emphasized the need for closer regional cooperation on wildlife trade issues, and called for the continued development, application and effectiveness of CITES.

The Chairman of the Standing Committee, Mr K. Stansell, drew attention to the ambitious agenda of the meeting, and noted that the Standing Committee had nominated outstanding candidates for the various offices, all of whom had accepted their nominations. He stressed the importance of adequate financing for implementation of the Strategic Vision of the Convention, observing that the demand for CITES-related activities continued to grow, apparently outstripping the willingness or ability of Parties to finance them. He noted that by July 2005, CITES would have been in force for 30 years, and observed that during that time no species included in the Appendices was known to have become extinct as a result of international trade — testimony to the success of the Convention.

The Executive Director of UNEP, Dr K. Töpfer, observed that CITES was a practical instrument linking conservation with economic development, and should be playing an important part in helping to meet the Millennium Development Goals. He applauded the increasing role CITES was playing in regulation of trade in economically important wild species, but stressed that there was a limit to what the Convention could do in isolation, noting that the way ahead was through cooperation with other organizations, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Tropical Timber Organization and the World Trade Organization. He also noted the importance of improving synergy between the biodiversity-related conventions in meeting the 2010 biodiversity target agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, drawing attention to a meeting on synergy between CITES and the Convention on Biological Diversity, hosted by Germany in April 2004 and supported among others by UNEP.

The Secretary-General, Mr W. Wijnstekers, expressed his gratitude to the Government and people of Thailand for hosting the meeting. He acknowledged the important role of non-governmental organizations in the meeting and said that CITES should be proud of the openness and transparency of its decision-making process. He emphasized the need for increased political will in most, if not all, of the 166 Parties in implementation of the Convention. He noted that, while CITES had great potential to contribute to achieving global goals and targets, its budget was currently insufficient to fulfil expectations. He expressed the view that CITES should be involved in regulation of trade in economically important species where it could add value to existing efforts. He highlighted common misconceptions about the effects of listing species in the Appendices and observed that

implementation of the Convention was becoming too complicated, indicating that the Secretariat would continue to identify procedures that could be simplified. Finally, he acknowledged the diversity of views represented at CITES meetings and encouraged participants to conduct discussions in a calm, friendly and respectful manner.

On behalf of the Government and people of Thailand, the Prime Minister, H.E. Dr Thaksin Shinawatra, welcomed the participants and stressed the importance of the work of the next two weeks. His country was proud to be hosting this meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES, the first to be held in Southeast Asia. In particular he drew attention to the problem of wildlife trafficking. Noting that illegal trade in wildlife was second only to that in weapons and drugs and was often linked to organized crime, he urged greater regional and global cooperation in law enforcement. He reported that Thailand had recently set up successful local 'task force' units to respond rapidly to illegal activity and proposed the establishment of a new regional law enforcement network against wildlife crime. If there was interest in this initiative, Thailand was ready to host a meeting in 2005 to pursue it. With this, he declared the meeting of the Conference of the Parties open.