

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



Seventy-eighth meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 3-8 February 2025

Administrative and financial matters

ARRANGEMENTS FOR MEETINGS OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.

Background and rationale

2. Resolution Conf. 19.1 on *Financing and the costed programme of work for the Secretariat for the triennium 2023-2025*, paragraph 32 a) "AFFIRMS that: all meetings of the Conference of the Parties should be held in the Host country of the Secretariat unless a candidate host country pays the difference in costs between its proposed venue and the Host country". This provision is normally repeated at every CoP in the Resolution with the title *Financing and the costed programme of work for the Secretariat for the triennium [years]*.
3. While there is no formal provision in the Convention text or the Rules of Procedure for the meetings of the Conference of the Parties regarding the identification of the CoP host country, it has been customary that, at a meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP), a Party (or multiple Parties) would submit their candidature to host the subsequent CoP meeting. The decision on the host would be made on the last day of the meeting under the agenda item on *Determination of the time and venue of the next regular meeting of the Conference of the Parties*, which may involve voting by secret ballot when there is more than one candidate.¹ This practice aligns with that of other Multilateral Environmental Agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on Migratory Species, the Minamata Convention on Mercury, and others.
4. Notably, the core budget of the Convention does not provide funds to organize a meeting of the CoP in *the Host country of the Secretariat* (Geneva, Switzerland). For instance, the core budget for the triennium 2023-2025 has an allocation of USD 30,000 in 2025 only, for the logistical support to CoP20. It reflects the expectation that the meeting of the CoP would generally be held outside Geneva and would rely on the CoP host countries to cover a significant share of the meeting costs, including conference venue, servicing personnel, e-voting and other ICT equipment and services, hospitality, security, and many other items.
5. This was put to test during the preparation of the last three meetings of the Conference of the Parties as outlined below:
 - a) CoP20 (Samarkand, 24 November – 5 December 2025): After the absence of any formal offer to host CoP20 for more than 12 months after CoP19, the Secretariat, under the instruction from the Standing Committee, started the process of preparing for organizing CoP20 in Geneva including fundraising to cover the associated costs, while continuing to seek a host or co-hosts. The deadline set for making the final decision on the location of CoP20 was 31 March 2024 to allow enough time to make arrangements to hold the meeting in 2025 (see [SC77 Summary Record](#), agenda item 15, Notifications to Parties [No. 2024/028](#) of 31 January 2024 and [No. 2024/055](#) of 22 April 2024). Uzbekistan expressed its interest to host CoP20 in April 2024, followed by an official offer in June 2024. After consultations with the Standing Committee, Uzbekistan was confirmed as the CoP20 host country in October 2024 (see Notification to Parties [No. 2024/110](#) of 3 October 2024, [No. 2024/117](#) of 22 October 2024.)

¹ See Rule 27 of the [Rules of Procedure of the Conference of the Parties \(as amended at the 19th meeting, Panama City, 2022\)](#).

- b) CoP19 (Panama City, 14-25 November 2022): At CoP18, Costa Rica offered to host CoP19 and was accepted by acclamation. However, in March 2021, Costa Rica formally withdrew its offer due to the financial and other impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Notification to Parties [No.2021/024](#) of 16 March 2021). After seeking expressions of interest from another Party (or Parties) to host (or co-host) CoP19 in the second half of 2022, Panama expressed its interest to host in July 2021. Following an informal consultation with the Standing Committee, Panama was confirmed in September 2021 as the new host country of CoP19 (see Notifications to Parties [No.2021/027](#) of 25 March 2021, [No. 2021/048](#) of 19 July 2021, and [No.2021/055](#) of 15 September 2021).
 - c) CoP18 (Geneva, 17-28 August 2019): At the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (Johannesburg, 24 September – 5 October 2018), Sri Lanka offered to host CoP18 and was accepted by acclamation. Following the April 2019 tragic bombing in the country (see Notification to the Parties [No. 2019/025](#) of 26 April 2019), the Secretariat, after careful consideration of the report of the United Nations Department of Safety and Security, and after consultations with the Standing Committee and Sri Lanka, announced that CoP18 would be held in Geneva (see Notification to the Parties [No. 2019/033](#) of 12 June 2019). A call for supplementary financial support was made (see Notification to the Parties [No. 2019/036](#) of 6 July 2019), which resulted in generous financial and in-kind support principally from Switzerland as well as from many Parties that made CoP18 possible at a short notice. The meeting was supported by several volunteers but suffered from the shortage of floor staff, such as meeting room assistants and ushers.
6. The Secretariat also has anecdotal information about other cases where the original host country had to withdraw its offer to host CoP meetings.
 7. While different circumstances prevailed for the above cases, each time the Standing Committee and the Secretariat had to consider Geneva as the CoP venue at some point in the process and discussed the challenge of meeting the significant financial challenges in pursuing this option. For CoP20, the Secretariat had estimated that USD 1,8-2,0 million would be required to cover the costs of organizing the meeting in Geneva. The Secretariat was allowed to mobilize some funds from the balance of the core Trust Fund in the short term to cover the initial costs for organizing the CoP in Geneva, but there would always be a need to raise additional funds to replenish the Trust Fund and cover the remaining costs of the meeting.
 8. Experience from these three intersessional periods underlines the necessity for Parties and the Secretariat to be better prepared for situations in the future that would require taking steps towards the organization of a CoP meeting in Geneva in accordance with Resolution Conf. 19.1, paragraph 32 a). Particular consideration is necessary on how to improve the process of securing the additional costs that will be incurred due to the lack of a CoP host country, so that it does not require an extraordinary call for financial support of a large scale with tight deadlines.

Ideas and options

9. Following an informal briefing of the Standing Committee (online, 22 March 2024), the Finance and Budget Subcommittee (FBSC) of the Standing Committee held two online meetings in April 2024 to assist the Secretariat in identifying the necessary resources for organizing CoP20, as the host country had not been confirmed at that time. FBSC members made suggestions on ways to finance CoP meetings and how to reduce costs, which provided a starting point in the search for improved preparedness in financing CoP meetings without a host country. Those suggestions are compiled and grouped into three categories below. The report of the FBSC as it was submitted to the Standing Committee for consideration in April 2024 is available as an information document for the present meeting under this agenda item.
10. The following are some of the suggestions of various sources of funds for financing CoP meetings without a host country:
 - a) Fundraising has been the main practice, as exemplified by the two Notifications to the Parties, [No. 2019/036](#) of 6 July 2019 and [No. 2024/055](#) of 22 April 2024 for CoP18 and CoP20, respectively. It may be useful if there is a standard procedure for seeking financial support, with indicative timelines for issuing the Notification to the Parties and consultation steps with the Standing Committee.
 - b) Adding a line item in the core budget with the full cost of organizing a CoP in Geneva. This would be a way to address the risk that a host country is not found, and the CoP still can take place as expected under the Convention. Further, if Parties wish to hold CoPs in diverse geographical regions, a portion

of the core budget could be used to help low- and middle-income countries finance part of their CoP costs, encouraging them to consider hosting.

- c) Use of registration fees from observer organizations accumulated from prior meetings is possible to cover some of the costs of the organization of the CoP meeting. The Secretariat notes that the average amount of registration fees from observer organizations accumulated from a single meeting of CoP is around USD 220,000.
- d) Innovative funding options were suggested, for example, generating revenue from vendors, private sector sponsors, and philanthropies.

11. Suggestions made on reducing the cost of the CoP meetings could be clustered into two solutions:

- a) Shortening the length of the in-person meeting could reduce the cost of the venue (e.g. plenary, working group and side event rooms), equipment (e.g. audio-visual and e-voting), services (catering, medical, cleaning) and personnel (e.g. meeting assistants and ushers, equipment technicians, security), as they are normally charged by the number of days or hours.

This could be done in different ways. One way is to reduce the number of agenda items to be discussed in-person by conducting part of the meeting online to advance discussions on some agenda items prior to the meeting or allowing an advance email exchange on some agenda items. The in-person segment of the CoP meeting would then be strictly limited to those agenda items that cannot be decided through other means. Another way to shorten the length of the in-person meeting would be to cut back the number of interventions and/or the length of each intervention during the discussions. A third option would be to reduce the number of agenda items altogether by exploring the possibility of consolidating certain documents and/or submitting certain documents as information documents rather than working documents. A fourth option would be to reduce the number of agenda items altogether with a prioritization of subjects as it is clear that over the last decade the agenda of the CoP has been growing exponentially.

- b) Limiting the number of in-person participants at the CoP venue could also lead to a possible cost reduction, as it would allow the use of smaller venues such as the Geneva International Conference Center (CICG) or the Palais des Nations, both of which are relatively economical options.

In general, CITES CoP meetings attract between 2,500 and 3,500 participants. With the current setup where Committees I and II meet simultaneously, there is a need to secure a venue that can accommodate two plenary rooms with the capacity of around 1,500 each. In contrast, CICG for example accommodates up to 2,200 participants in total, with the capacity of its two largest rooms being 940 and 712². This could be accommodated by limiting the number of delegates per Party and per observer entity, while encouraging others to use livestreaming.

12. The Secretariat draws the attention of the Standing Committee on potential conditions and constraints regarding the options mentioned above, some of which has been raised with the FBSC during its two online meetings in April 2024.

- a) As a UN entity, the CITES Secretariat must follow the relevant rules, regulations and policies of the United Nations (UN) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) regarding private sector engagement (for receiving funds) as well as procurement of products and services from for-profit providers (such as caterers, vendor of goods, etc.). Due diligence must be conducted for each possible non-governmental donor funds, while the procurement procedure must be delegated to the procurement office at the duty station or UN Office at Geneva (UNOG). Ideas for generating revenue from and saving costs of CoP meetings, and any other CITES meetings, must therefore take these into consideration (which could incur additional administrative and human resources costs). In addition, some venues, such as CICG, may have additional constraints and restrictions regarding bringing external sub-vendors into their premises.
- b) The involvement of non-government entities in funding the CoP meetings could be perceived as allowing them to influence the substantive matters of the meeting.

² <https://cicg.ch/en/organiser/your-event/our-spaces/conference-rooms>

- c) The financial management of the CITES Core Trust Fund (CTL) adheres to the United Nations Financial Regulations and Rules which stipulate that unspent funds from a given calendar year would revert to the fund balance of the General Trust Fund of CITES and will require prior approval by the Standing Committee and by CoP to carryover unspent funds to subsequent financial periods.
13. While the FBSC focuses on the financial aspects of organizing CoP meetings in Geneva, there may be other ideas that could be explored further for the Convention to improve its preparedness against situations such as those described in paragraph 5 above.
- a) Backup process for identifying and securing an alternative CoP host country before organizing a meeting in Geneva: The system of rotating the responsibility for hosting the CoP among the CITES regions, which was suggested by the Secretariat at the informal briefing of the Standing Committee in March 2024, did not gain support of some members due to the different capacities of hosting large meetings in each region. However, the Standing Committee may wish to consider some form of a regional support system, whereby each of the six CITES regions (Africa, Asia, Central and South America and the Caribbean, Europe, North America, Oceania) may support the CoP host country in their region, including identifying alternative host(s) should the original host country decide to withdraw.
 - b) Co-hosting/co-sponsoring of CoP meetings: Parties, in exploring their interest to host CoP meetings, may wish to look for other Parties that are willing to make a financial contribution or provide an in-kind contribution (e.g. venues, equipment, services, personnel, etc.). For example, a donor country Party may be willing to provide financial support to a low- or middle-income country Party interested in hosting a CoP meeting. The Secretariat could play a role in matching such Parties.
 - g) Planning further ahead: while the current practice is to search potential hosts for the successive CoP meeting, it may be beneficial to expand the search for multiple CoPs in advance. This will help Parties that may be interested in hosting a CoP meeting, but may need more time for government approval, budgeting and preparation. The Secretariat will prepare a short guidance note for interested CoP host countries as an information document to this meeting, under the current agenda item, which provides information on the logistical, financial and other frequently asked questions from past prospective host countries.
14. On the last point of planning for CoP meetings further ahead, the Secretariat is pleased to inform the Standing Committee that Panama has sent an official offer to host the 21st meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP21), which is scheduled for 2028. The formal letter of offer is annexed to this document. The Standing Committee may wish to consider this offer and make recommendations to the Conference of the Parties for its consideration at its 20th meeting.

Conclusions

15. From recent experience in organizing the meetings of the CITES Conference of the Parties, improved preparedness – both in terms of financial and procedural terms – in identifying the host country and organizing the meeting in a timely matter is both urgently needed and beneficial in the long term. It may be necessary to undertake a cost-benefit analysis of the options listed in paragraphs 9 through 11 above and solicit more ideas and options in addressing the concerns
16. The Secretariat suggests that a budget line in CITES Core Trust Fund (CTL) be added for CoP organization in the next triennial budget for 2026-2028, while it prepares a guidance to be considered by the Conference of the Parties regarding how to raise funds for a CoP without a host, as well as how to reduce costs of organizing a CoP if an offer to host is not forthcoming. The Standing Committee may therefore wish to request the Conference of the Parties to continue its consideration through a set of draft decisions contained in the Annex to the present document.

Recommendations

17. The Standing Committee is invited to:
- a) acknowledge with appreciation Panama's offer to host CoP21;
 - b) request the Secretariat to include a new budget line in the operational budget under the CITES Core Trust Fund (CTL) for the triennium 2026-2028; and

- c) review and submit to the Conference of the Parties draft decisions 20.AA to 20.CC on *Arrangements for meetings of the Conference of the Parties* contained in the Annex to the present document.

DRAFT DECISIONS ON
ARRANGEMENTS FOR MEETINGS OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES

Directed to Parties

20.AA Parties are encouraged to consider hosting future meeting of the Conference of the Parties, as well as in providing financial and in-kind support to the logistical organization of the meeting hosted by other Parties.

Directed to the Standing Committee

20.BB The Standing Committee shall:

- a) request its Finance and Budget Subcommittee to continue the consideration of improved financial preparedness for the future meetings of the Conference of the Parties; and
- b) provide inputs to the Secretariat on the guidance and additional information and tools described in Decision 20.CC, as appropriate.

Directed to the Secretariat

20.CC With inputs from the Standing Committee, the Secretariat shall:

- a) prepare a guidance on raising funds in support of the logistical organization of the meeting of the Conference of the Parties and on reducing costs of the organization of the meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in cases when an offer from a potential host country is not forthcoming;
- b) in implementing of paragraph a) above, take into consideration procedural elements including timelines and required documents for receiving proposals from potential host countries, as well as the roles of the Standing Committee Members in advising and assisting the interested Parties;
- c) prepare additional information and tools that would support the guidance to ensure preparedness and transparency in the process of the logistical organization of the meetings of the Conference of the Parties; and
- d) submit them for the consideration and approval of the Conference of the Parties.