

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



Seventy-seventh meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 6–10 November 2023

Administrative and financial matters

SPONSORED DELEGATES PROJECT

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 19th meeting (CoP19; Panama City, 2022), the Conference of the Parties maintained Decision 18.12 and adopted Decision 19.10 on the *Sponsored Delegates Project* as follows:

Directed to the Secretariat

18.12 *The Secretariat shall:*

- a) *continue to apply clear selection criteria, taking into account the various possible options for the selection criteria and additional ways to prioritize beneficiary Parties, including the guidelines of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD-DAC) and the prioritization of small island developing States and least developed countries;*
- b) *explore further the practical arrangements for the provision of support under the Sponsored Delegates Project for delegates attending the meetings of the Animals, Plants and Standing Committees; and*
- c) *bring any recommendations to the attention of the Standing Committee or the Conference of the Parties, as appropriate.*

Directed to the Secretariat

19.10 *Subject to external funding, the Secretariat shall:*

- a) *offer to provide financial support for the participation at meetings of the Standing Committee of a maximum of two delegates from each developing country Party subject to an Article-XIII process; and*
- b) *report on the implementation of paragraph a) and bring any recommendations to the attention of the Conference of the Parties, as appropriate.*

Implementation of Decision 18.12

3. The detailed outcome of the Sponsored Delegates Project (SDP) for the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP19) was reported in information document [CoP19 Inf.100 \(Rev.1\)](#).
4. In considering the selection criteria applied for the SDP and the practical arrangements for the provision of support under the Sponsored Delegates Project for delegates attending the meetings of the Animals, Plants and Standing Committees, the Secretariat would like to reiterate what the current SDP process involves,

and highlight the challenges encountered, in order to bring its recommendations to the attention of the Standing Committee regarding the future operation of the SDP.

Fundraising

5. The SDP process ideally starts approximately 15 months before the CoP in the form of donor outreach and the launch of the [SDP page](#) on the CITES website. For CoP19, this was delayed due to the late change in the host country for CoP19, which was confirmed in July 2021. The Secretariat issued Notification to the Parties [No. 2021/057](#) of 1 October 2021 and [No. 2022/039](#) of 24 May 2022 seeking contributions from interested Parties and other potential donors. Due to time constraints, both Notifications were combined with the request for the nomination of sponsored delegates. Pledges were published on the SDP web page as they were received. The Secretariat notes that any specific requirements or conditions of the donor regarding the use of the contribution must be confirmed at this time. Pledges for funds must be confirmed at the latest five months before the CoP in order to determine the approximate number of beneficiaries that can be covered by the SDP. Furthermore, the donor funds must be deposited with the Secretariat at least three months before the CoP to allow for timely travel arrangements. Indeed, the Secretariat cannot start any travel arrangement until cash availability is confirmed. For CoP19, a few donors were unable to transfer the funds until weeks before CoP19, which meant that the funds could not be used to arrange for travel of delegates to the CoP.

Nomination of the sponsored delegates by Parties

6. The solicitation of interested Parties to apply for the financial support starts approximately 12 months before CoP. For CoP19, Notification to Parties [No. 2021/057](#) was issued on 1 October 2021, which was followed by a reminder on 24 May 2022 (Notification to the Parties [No. 2022/039](#)). Issues such as late nominations, changes in the nominations, nominations of more than the agreed number of delegates per Party, nominations that do not list the order of priority, and insufficient documentation complicate the travel arrangements.
7. In the same Notifications, and pursuant to Resolution Conf. 17.3 (Rev. CoP19), “governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and private bodies which decide to fund directly the participation in CoP19 of representatives from other Parties, as well as Parties whose delegates benefited from such funding” were also urged to inform the Secretariat to avoid duplications. The Secretariat did not receive any information in this regard.

Selection of the sponsored delegates

8. The selection of the sponsored delegates starts approximately five months before the CoP, once the number of beneficiaries that can be covered by the confirmed funds is estimated (see paragraph 5 above). The Secretariat uses a combination of many factors for the selection of sponsored delegates. First, the [Human Development Index \(HDI\)](#) ranking of the given year is used to list the Parties that submitted within the deadline in the order of priority to receive support. Submissions for sponsorship received after the deadline are added at the end of this list, regardless of their HDI ranking. Other factors are then taken into account for the selection, which include:
 - Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and/or Small Island Development States (SIDS);
 - Number of actual delegates at the preceding CoP (Parties with less than six delegates were prioritised);
 - Member of the Standing Committee;
 - Parties subject to compliances processes, including Article XIII and National Ivory Action Plan (NIAP);
 - Parties that submitted working documents or (co-)proposed amendment proposals for the upcoming CoP; and
 - Categories determined by the [Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) (OECD DAC), which is requested by many donor Parties as a condition.

The Party and the selected delegates are informed as to whether one or two delegates have been selected or placed on a waiting list. Selected delegates are requested to ensure that they are included in their Party's credentials.

Travel arrangements for the confirmed sponsored delegates

9. The travel arrangement procedures start once the delegate is confirmed, which involves registration of their details in the UN financial system, preparation of air tickets addressing any transit needs, and preparation for the issuance of the Daily Subsistence Allowance (DSA). The delegates are requested to obtain their visa at this time, which is normally required for the issuance of the flight tickets. The travel arrangement steps for the confirmed sponsored delegates are expected to be completed at least 2 weeks before the start of the CoP. In reality, it continues up to the days before, and even after the start of the CoP, as donor funds arrive late, Parties request for last-minute changes in the delegations or travel itinerary, or for other reasons.

At the CoP venue

10. The Secretariat continues to coordinate with the sponsored delegates as they begin their travel, tending to any flight changes, missed connections and other issues encountered en route. Once at the CoP venue, the Secretariat verifies the sponsored delegates, obtains their boarding passes and issues the DSA. 'Swiss Bankers cash cards' – pre-loaded and reusable nominative debit cards – have been used at recent CoPs; since the cards can be used for future UN and CITES meetings, and the cards can be cancelled in case they are lost or stolen. Just before or during the CoP, the Secretariat issues an information document summarizing the outcome of the SDP. For CoP19, information document [CoP19 Inf.100 \(Rev.1\)](#) shows that 101 Party delegates from 67 Parties were funded by the CoP19 SDP, of which 97 Party delegates were fully funded and four Party delegates partially funded.

Application of selection criteria

11. The Secretariat continues to apply selection criteria as summarised in paragraph 7 above and detailed in information document [CoP19 Inf.100 \(Rev.1\)](#), while taking into account other criteria for prioritizing beneficiary Parties such as, the OECD DAC guidelines and the prioritization of LDCs and SIDS. There are advantages in using the Human Development Index in combination with these criteria: the HDI ranking allows the Secretariat to set a clear 'limit', i.e. precisely how far down the HDI list the funding could reach within the total available budget. The other criteria are priority groupings of countries, which allow Parties that are outside this ranking 'limit' to be potentially selected for funding.
12. The timing of the request made by Parties is another factor that will affect the application of the selection; given the tight schedule described in the paragraphs above, the Secretariat starts making the travel arrangements of the confirmed sponsored delegates on a first-come, first-served basis within the estimated maximum number of participants that can be sponsored. Once all the funds have been committed, the Secretariat will be unable to guarantee the sponsorship regardless of the Party's HDI ranking.
13. As the Sponsored Delegates Project continues to be successful in raising only about 50-60% of the fundraising target, the above-mentioned process has provided the best practicable means to guide the Secretariat in the selection of beneficiaries. Using a combination of criteria has resulted in a complex and lengthy selection process. However, the Secretariat will continue to improve this with the experience it is gaining at every CoP.

Challenges and lessons learned

14. The heavy burden of the Sponsored Delegates Project affects the work of the Secretariat to effectively service the CoPs, particularly for the administration and finance unit, which manages over 100 travel arrangements and administers other aspects of the CoP preparations in addition to its day to day tasks. From recent experience, the work requires the regular work and supervision from five Secretariat staff and needs at least three additional temporary assistants to provide dedicated support to the SDP processes prior to and during CoPs in the area of registration, documentation, and travel. At least one of the three temporary assistants must have a short-term or temporary staff contract, which allows access to the UN administrative and financial system.
15. The time and costs for bringing on board the extra assistance need to be accounted for as part of the regular SDP process. The short-term or temporary staff post could be paid from the SDP budget, while the other two assistants could be financed from the registration fees. Recruitment could take between 4 and 12 months depending on the contract type.
16. Challenges encountered during the fundraising step include the late arrival of funds (i.e., long lag time between the pledge and cash availability), additional conditions set by donors, and requests for individualized

reporting. As SDP pools all donor contributions into one fund, it is not possible to identify which donor funded which individuals, or to generate individualized financial reports. Additional conditions, such as non-eligible countries, regional preferences, etc. also bring complications to the process.

17. On the side of the sponsored delegates, late submission of applications, insufficient documentation provided by the confirmed delegates, and last-minute changes are the three main challenges that the Secretariat faces. While it would be ideal to have hard cutoff deadlines for the submission and confirmation of sponsorship nominations, the Secretariat makes an extra effort to cater to the individual circumstances and needs of the developing country Parties, some of which may need to cancel or change their delegation after arrangements have been finalized. Meeting these needs can be complex and requires the Secretariat to tend to each case individually. The challenge is to balance the maintenance of coherent deadlines with the need to support the Parties, and at times it has a significant impact on the ability to inform the delegates on the wait list in a timely manner.
18. The timely issuance of the visa to travel to the CoP venue is the responsibility of the host country. While the Secretariat can issue a 'visa letter', the host country is reminded to comply with the provisions in the Host Country Agreement pertaining to the issuance of visas and is encouraged to discuss it with the other Ministries providing services and support when reviewing the draft Host Country Agreement and well ahead of the CoP. The individual delegates also have a responsibility to research the travel requirements for the host country as well as any transit countries and prepare and submit their documentation on time. Having good information about the requirements will reduce the risks of having to purchase new tickets or not be able to leave the host country as planned.

Implementation of Decision 18.12, paragraph b)

19. In sum, the CoP SDP process takes more than a year of preparations involving significant human resource. Considering that travel of developing country Members of AC, PC and SC is covered from the core budget, the expansion of SDP to generally cover the travel of non-Members to the SC, AC and PC meetings would entail an administrative and financial burden that is not realistic necessary in the Secretariat's view. The Secretariat therefore does not recommend the further exploration of arrangements for the provision of such support unless the donor countries are prepared to cover the significant additional costs associated with broadening the SDP for other meetings.

Implementation of Decision 19.10

20. Pursuant to Decision 19.10, paragraph a), the Secretariat issued Notification to the Parties [No. 2023/053](#) of 25 April 2023 to call for financial support to allow the participation of delegates from developing country Parties subject to an Article-XIII process at the 77th meeting of the Standing Committee. At the time of writing, no offer for funding has been received. Consequently, the Secretariat has not been able to provide support to such Parties. The Secretariat will make an oral report at SC77 regarding Parties subject to an Article-XIII process that were not able to attend the meeting.
21. The Secretariat recognizes the importance of having an in-person presence of the Party that is subject to an Article-XIII process at the SC meeting when its case is being discussed. The Secretariat therefore considers this as a special circumstance when the heavier administrative burden may be justified. Funding would have to be secured so that future support can be provided.

Conclusions

22. As noted in document [CoP19 Doc. 7.6](#), the administration of the Sponsored Delegates Project has important workload implications for the Secretariat. While the use of clear selection criteria and electronic registration systems have improved the process significantly, continued improvements are needed to make them more efficient, particularly in the following areas:
 - a) Clearer deadlines for donors to transfer the funds to SDP;
 - b) Flexible donor conditions in terms of the funds expiry and donor reporting requirements;
 - c) Establishment of a financial system that allows funds to be kept and used flexibly across multiple meetings of the Standing Committee (limited to Article XIII countries) and of the Conference of the Parties;

- d) Stricter deadlines for sponsored delegates nominations;
- e) Improved communication of selection criteria and procedures communicated to Parties;
- f) Strengthened host country arrangements for facilitated visa issuance to sponsored delegates; and
- g) Securing additional assistance to support the CoP SDP process.

Recommendations

23. The Standing Committee is invited to:

- a) agree that the general provision of support under the Sponsored Delegates Project for non-Member delegates attending the meetings of the Animals, Plants and Standing Committees would not be possible at this time;
- b) recommend to the Conference of the Parties to expand the SDP to the Standing Committee only in support of the participation of developing country Parties subject to an Article-XIII process possibly by maintaining Decision 19.10;
- c) encourage Parties to make their financial contributions to the Sponsored Delegates Project as early as possible for maximum use and preferably no later than five months before the meeting of the CoP and with flexibility regarding the use; and
- d) confirm that Decision 18.12 has been implemented fully and agree to propose its deletion at the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties.