

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



Informal briefing with the Secretariat to discuss the date and venue of CITES CoP19  
12.30-14.00 (Geneva time) 16 July 2021

AIDE-MEMOIRE

**1. Welcome by the SC Chair and Secretary-General.**

The Secretary-General, Ivonne Higuero, and the Chair of the Standing Committee (SC Chair), Carolina Caceres, welcomed members and alternate members of the Standing Committee to the informal briefing. The Secretary-General explained that the purpose of the informal briefing was to provide information on the latest developments regarding the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP19), to explain the steps the Secretariat intends to take next and seek guidance from the SC on the way forward. She noted that the information to be discussed follows on from successful online meetings of the Animals and Plants Committees (AC and PC) and expressed the hope that this was a positive sign for a post-COVID future. The SC Chair thanked the Secretariat for the initiative of calling the briefing and welcomed the Secretariat keeping the Committee and Parties up-to-date with its work and developments affecting CITES implementation

**2. Offer to host CoP19 from the Government of the Republic of Panama.**

The Secretary-General recalled that Costa Rica had unfortunately had to withdraw its offer to host CoP19 and that, after informing the SC of its intention to do so, the Secretariat had issued a Notification seeking expressions of interest by 30 June 2021 from another Party (or Parties) to host (or co-host) CoP19 in the second half of 2022. The Secretariat had received an expression of interest from the Republic of Panama. The Secretary-General had met the Minister of the Environment and other senior officials in Panama and had the opportunity to make a visit to the conference centre which Panama was proposing to use for CoP19. She reported that on 30 June 2021, the Republic of Panama officially confirmed its offer to host CITES CoP19 and their official letter had been circulated to the members and alternate members of the SC prior to the briefing.

The Secretariat had received no other expressions of interest to host CoP19 from Parties by the deadline.

**3. Presentation of the offer by representatives of the Government of Panama.**

The Secretary-General invited a representative from Panama to join the briefing. Shirley Habiba Binder Zbeda, Director of Protected Areas and Biodiversity and head of the CITES Management Authority, Ministry of Environment of Panama, addressed the briefing. Using a PowerPoint presentation, she presented facts about the rich biodiversity of Panama and expressed the hope that Panama's offer to host CoP19 would be accepted. She also showed two videos; one with nature scenes of Panama and the other of the Panama Convention Center where it was proposed to hold the meeting of the CoP.

The Secretary-General invited questions to the representative from Panama.

Indonesia thanked Panama for its offer and asked about health care for CoP19 participants during the meeting and numbers of hospitals, what measures they would need to take before arrival in Panama and whether Panama would keep Parties informed of the health situation prior to the meeting of the CoP.

Panama replied that it was difficult to predict what the public health situation would be in November 2022, but that over 1 million people in the country had been vaccinated so far and the whole population was expected to be vaccinated before the end of the year. Panama stressed that the conference centre was very large, enabling social distancing measures to be applied, that there were many public and private hospitals in the vicinity of the conference centre, and that throughout they would be involving the national health ministry in arrangements for the meeting. Panama assured the members that they would keep everyone well-informed on these matters.

The Secretary-General added that the safety of CoP participants was an essential priority for the Secretariat and that it would be paying close attention to the issue in the organization of any meeting.

The Secretary-General thanked the representative of Panama who then left the briefing.

#### **4. Consideration of offer**

The Secretary-General stated that after explaining the obligations of hosting a meeting of the CoP with the Panamanian Minister of the Environment and other representatives of the Government, and visiting the conference centre, which is due to open in July 2021, the Secretariat was confident that if pandemic conditions allowed, CoP19 could be held in excellent conditions in Panama. She invited the views of the members and alternate members of the SC.

The SC Chair expressed her deep appreciation for the offer by Panama, that the venue looked large and modern, and that if the public health situation permitted it should be an excellent venue to hold CoP19. In view of current uncertainties, however, she considered that it would be wise to have a contingency plan in place.

Israel considered that Panama would be an excellent host but queried what contingency measures would be put in place if the pandemic persisted. They also asked whether Panama had been offered a reduction of the costs associated with hosting meetings of the Conference of the Parties and whether Panama would become a member of the SC.

The Secretary-General noted that contingency measures would be discussed under agenda item 5. She confirmed that the financial provisions of the Host Country Agreement would be the same as for any other meeting of the CoP. She also confirmed that if selected to host CoP19, Panama would join the Standing Committee in a non-voting capacity as “next host Party”.

Indonesia welcomed the offer and supported holding CoP19 in Panama but cautioned that the final dates selected should seek to avoid clashing with other international environment meetings.

Honduras and Peru offered their full support for holding CoP19 in Panama. Peru also shared concerns about the health and safety of delegates raised by others.

Summing up, the SC Chair, noted that other than concerns about the health and safety of participants [associated with the ongoing uncertainties resulting from the COVID-19 situation](#), the Standing Committee warmly accepted the offer from Panama to host CoP19 in November 2022 and agreed that the Secretariat should work with Panama to finalize the exact dates and logistical arrangements and inform Parties accordingly.

#### **5. Future actions required.**

The representative from Panama rejoined the briefing for agenda item 5.

The Secretary-General noted that Resolution Conf. 18.1 requires any candidate host country to sign a Host Country Agreement for CoP no later than 60 days after the decision is made to hold the meeting outside the host country of the Secretariat. Having already shared a draft Host Country Agreement with Panama, the Secretariat will work with Panama to confirm the date and venue of the meeting and for the signing of the HCA.

However, given recent events and the current pandemic, she reported that the Secretariat had already begun to plan for some contingency arrangements if CoP19 could not be held in Panama. As explained in document SC73 Doc. 28, the Secretariat had reserved the dates of 9-21 July 2022 for CoP19 at the Centre International de Conférences Genève (CICG) in Geneva, Switzerland. She explained that the CICG was now going to be closed for renovation at that time, unfortunately, but that alternative dates in October or November 2022 were being reviewed. If a contract was signed to reserve these dates at CICG then there may be cancellation charges if they were no longer required. These could amount to up to 150,000 CHF. The Secretariat is investigating insurance coverage for such an eventuality.

Should it not be possible to hold CoP19 in Panama for public health safety reasons, it may be that these concerns would also prevail in Geneva. In that case the Secretariat-General indicated that an online CoP may

be the only solution, if only to deal with the question of the Trust Fund budget which needs to be renewed before the end of 2022.

With CoP19 likely to be in November 2022, the Secretary-General explained that there was scope to delay the holding of SC74 until the first quarter of 2022 and that the Secretariat was corresponding with France after it offered to consider hosting SC74 during the discussions at SC73.

The Secretary-General suggested that SC74 in March or April 2022 may be an appropriate time to take a final decision on holding a face-to-face meeting of CoP19 in Panama. She was hopeful the public health situation relating to the pandemic should be clearer by then and she sought the views on the Standing Committee on this suggestion.

The SC Chair shared the Secretary-General's analysis and conclusions and stressed the need to keep the SC Finance and Budget Subcommittee informed of all possible financial consequences of actions taken, which was agreed.

Israel, supported by New Zealand, preferred to hold SC74 in February or March 2022, rather than April 2022.

Israel and the United States of America queried whether the delayed timeframe could allow AC and PC to meet again. The Secretary-General said that the scientific committees had no plans to do so but agreed to a suggestion from the SC Chair to consult the chairs of AC and PC on this point, taking into account any financial and logistical constraints.

The SC Chair concluded that taking a final decision on holding a face-to-face CoP19 in Panama should be taken at SC74. She added that a later date for SC74 may increase the chances of holding that meeting face-to-face and that March 2022 may be a good compromise window to hold the meeting.

The Secretary-General recalled that the members of the selection panel established by the SC to identify nominees to chair the committees at CoP19 was announced at SC73. She advised that as soon as final dates for CoP19 are agreed with Panama, the Secretariat would issue a Notification to the Parties calling for suggestions for candidates to fill these posts. The SC Chair encouraged SC Members to assist with efforts to find suitable chairs for CoP given the importance of these posts for a successful meeting.

In closing the briefing, the Secretary-General, joined by the SC Chair, thanked Members for their presence and engagement and expressed the fervent hope that CoP19 could be held face-to-face in Panama in November 2022.

**Participant list**

<b>Member</b>	
<b>AFRICA</b>	
<b>Congo</b>	ABSENT
<b>Ethiopia</b>	Admas Messele Arega Mekonnen
<b>Namibia</b>	Fillemon Iifo Elly Hamunyela
<b>Morocco</b>	Hayat Mesbah
<b>Kenya (alternate)</b>	Solomon Kyalo
<b>ASIA</b>	
<b>China (SC Vice Chair)</b>	YAN Yiru JI Jing
<b>Kuwait</b>	Shereefa Al-Salem
<b>Indonesia</b>	Fifin Nopiansyah
<b>Japan (alternate)</b>	Hitoshi Kozaki Akira Osawa
<b>CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN</b>	
<b>Bahamas</b>	Deandra Delancey-Milfort
<b>Honduras</b>	José Julián Suazo Cervantes
<b>Peru</b>	Doris Mercedes Rodríguez Guzmán Jessica Gálvez-Durand Besnard
<b>EUROPE</b>	
<b>Poland</b>	Karol Wolnicki Wojciech Piwowarski
<b>Israel</b>	Simon Nemtsov Yatir Shamir
<b>Belgium</b>	Elke Malfait
<b>Russian Federation</b>	Evgeny Kuznetsov
<b>Georgia (alternate)</b>	Teona Karchava
<b>NORTH AMERICA</b>	
<b>Canada (SC Chair)</b>	Carolina Cáceres Cecilia Loughheed
<b>United States of America (alternate)</b>	Pamela Scruggs
<b>OCEANIA</b>	
<b>New Zealand</b>	Sarah Bagnall
<b>Australia (alternate)</b>	Susan Cooper Rhedyn Ollerenshaw Damien Wrigley
<b>DEPOSITARY</b>	
<b>Switzerland</b>	ABSENT
<b>GUEST (AGENDA ITEMS 3 AND 5)</b>	
<b>Panama</b>	Shirley Habiba Binder Zbeda