

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

Fifty-third meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 27 June-1 July 2005

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

ILLEGAL TRADE IN TIGERS

1. This document has been submitted by the United States of America on behalf of the North American region.

Background

2. In 1994 at the 9th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP9), the Parties adopted Resolution Conf. 9.13, which urges Parties as a matter of urgency to adopt legislation to control the persistent illegal trade in tiger parts and derivatives. At its 35th, 36th and 37th meetings, the Standing Committee reviewed progress in implementing this Resolution.
3. In 1997 at CoP10, the Parties strengthened this resolution [Resolution Conf. 9.13 (Rev.)] to include specific steps to address the dramatic decline in wild tiger populations. The Parties also adopted Decision 10.66 calling on the Standing Committee to undertake technical and political missions to tiger range and consumer States to assist in developing strategies for improving control of tiger trade and related activities.
4. In 1998 the CITES Tiger Missions Technical Team visited 14 range and consumer States and prepared a report incorporating general observations made during its missions and recommendations relating to international strategies. The Team looked at legislation and enforcement, anti-poaching efforts, public education and outreach, and other domestic controls. The Team's report was considered and accepted by the Standing Committee at its 42nd meeting. The Secretariat and the Chairman of the Standing Committee undertook a high level political mission to three key countries later in 1999, and the results were reported to the 43rd meeting of the Standing Committee in 1999, just prior to CoP11.
5. In 2000 at CoP11, the Parties adopted 10 decisions directed to the Parties on halting the illegal trade in tigers. The Parties also adopted decisions directing the Standing Committee to continue reviewing progress of tiger range and consumer States in controlling illegal tiger trade, enacting legislative and enforcement measures, and implementing the recommendations of the Tiger Technical and Political Missions. The Parties also established the Tiger Enforcement Task Force (TETF), an enforcement group, with the objective of combating illicit trade in tigers and tiger parts and derivatives. The first meeting of the TETF was held in 2001 in India.
6. In 2002 at CoP12, the Parties repealed Resolution Conf. 11.5 and replaced it with a number of decisions related to Asian big cats. The Parties were asked to report any significant seizures of Asian big cat parts and derivatives and to provide information on their efforts to engage local communities in the conservation of Asian big cats and their habitats (Decisions 12.29 and 12.30). The Parties also directed the Standing Committee to "ensure that recommendations made by the Missions continue to be implemented" (Decision 12.31) and to report to CoP13 on the progress of range and consumer States with regard to the Asian big cats (Decision 12.32).

7. In 2004 at CoP13, the Parties directed the Secretariat to convene a special meeting of the TETF to “examine, in particular, the issue of illicit trade in Asian big cat skins with a view to facilitating and improving the exchange of enforcement information and the coordination of investigations” (Decision 13.22). The only resolution remaining in effect to address the issue following CoP13 is Resolution Conf. 12.5 on Conservation of and trade in tigers and other Appendix-I Asian big cat species.
8. In 2004 investigations by international and national non-governmental organizations highlighted the resurgence of an historic threat to tigers – the illegal international trade in tiger skins for traditional garments.
9. In 2005 reports in the Indian press noted that tiger populations may have been extirpated from some protected areas of India. Tiger populations in India and other countries continue to be impacted by habitat loss, human persecution, and poaching and illegal trade in tigers and their parts and derivatives for decorative and medicinal purposes.
10. In April 2005, the Secretary-General of CITES sent a letter (available on the CITES website) to the Indian Prime Minister offering the full support of CITES in promoting stronger conservation and anti-poaching measures for Indian tigers. The Secretary-General requested a meeting with the Indian Prime Minister at his earliest possible convenience “in order to accelerate cooperation between CITES and India and to engage the international community more fully in addressing the tiger crisis”. The letter reiterated the Secretariat’s often expressed concern that enforcement coordination and collaboration amongst various Indian agencies has not always been most effective and that an interagency specialized wildlife crime unit, recommended by the 1998 Tiger Mission to address this coordination, had still not been established.
11. In May 2005 the Secretariat plans to convene a meeting of the TETF members (Decision 13.22) to discuss the illegal trade in skins of Asian big cats. The meeting will bring together CITES and Customs and police officials from China, India and Nepal to exchange information and intelligence and to help design strategies for increasing cross-border cooperation and coordination of investigations.

Recommendations

12. Over the past 10 years, the Standing Committee has had an historic leadership role and long-term involvement in urging Parties, as a matter of highest priority, to further tighten national, regional, and international enforcement efforts in combating poaching and illegal trade in this Appendix-I species. Given the continuing decline of wild tiger populations; the high degree of commercial threat from international trade to these populations, and the resurgence of an historic market for tiger parts, the North American region suggests that the Committee reinvigorate and strengthen its efforts to halt the illegal trade. These efforts could include:
 - a) a verbal report to SC53 by the Secretariat of the results of the May 2005 Tiger Enforcement Task Force Meeting including, where possible and practical, what decisions the TETF has made with regard to halting the tiger poaching and illegal trade;
 - b) a verbal report to SC53 by the Secretary-General on his meeting with the Indian Prime Minister as described in paragraph 10 above, or, if it has not yet occurred, a request to convene the meeting at the earliest convenience;
 - c) a verbal report to SC53 by the three Parties (China, India, and Nepal) on implementation of all outstanding recommendations from the 1998 Tiger Mission and Political Missions and the results of such implementation and enforcement including, for those recommendations that have not been implemented yet, an indication of the Parties’ plans and timetables to implement them;
 - d) a report to SC54 by China, India and Nepal on their regional law enforcement efforts and any national controls, including outreach, that have been implemented and their effect in reducing or halting the poaching and illegal trade;

- e) a report to SC54 by the Secretariat, the TETF and/or other qualified government law enforcement experts assessing the regional efforts and recommending further measures to the three countries or the Standing Committee to halt poaching and illegal trade; and
- f) reports to SC54 by non-governmental organizations and other organizations on efforts made to halt the illegal trade, with a particular emphasis on outreach efforts.