

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



Fifty-fourth meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva (Switzerland), 2-6 October 2006

Interpretation and implementation of the Convention

Species trade and conservation issues

GREAT APES

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.

Background

2. Resolution Conf. 13.4 (Conservation of and trade in great apes) "URGES the Secretariat, the Standing Committee and the Animals Committee to work closely with GRASP, and to explore and implement other measures through which the Convention can contribute to the conservation of great apes and to the promotion of public awareness of the threat posed to great ape populations by illegal trade". The Standing Committee is also directed to:
 - a) *review the implementation of this Resolution at each of its regular meetings on the basis of the Secretariat's reports; and*
 - c) *report at each meeting of the Conference of the Parties on the implementation of this Resolution, with any recommendations for further action.*

Information relating to GRASP

3. The Secretariat of GRASP (Great Apes Survival Project), which is jointly provided by UNEP and UNESCO, organized the first Intergovernmental Meeting on Great Apes and the first GRASP Council meeting in Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, from 5 to 9 September 2005. The Kinshasa Declaration, a high-level statement on the future of great apes was adopted during the meeting. Sixteen range States, six donor countries, 25 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) partners, two Multilateral Environmental Agreements and two intergovernmental organizations signed the Declaration during the meeting and more have signed since. The CITES Secretariat was represented at the meeting and it signed the Declaration. The Secretariat was also elected to represent Multilateral Environmental Agreements on the GRASP Executive Committee. The full text of the Declaration can be found at:
<http://www.unep.org/grasp/Meetings/IGM-kinshasa/Outcomes/docs/Declaration%20E%2011-04-06.pdf> (in English and French only).
4. The event in Kinshasa received considerable media attention and the commitment of support for GRASP that was shown by governments, international organizations and NGOs was very encouraging.

Technical missions

5. At its 13th meeting (Bangkok, 2004), the Conference of the Parties to CITES adopted Resolution Conf. 13.4. As part of the means identified in the Resolution to improve conservation of great apes,

the CITES Standing Committee is directed to "consider other measures such as technical missions, organized in cooperation with GRASP and other appropriate partnerships, followed by political missions if necessary". At its 53rd meeting (SC53, Geneva, June – July 2005), the Standing Committee endorsed a recommendation by the CITES Secretariat that it should, in conjunction with the GRASP Secretariat, undertake missions to Southeast Asia to study the illicit trade in orang-utans.

6. The CITES Secretariat subsequently contacted the CITES Management Authorities of Indonesia and Malaysia, as these countries are orang-utan range States, and requested an invitation to conduct technical missions to both countries. Similar requests were made to Cambodia and Thailand, as these countries have been destinations for significant illegal trade in orang-utans. Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand all indicated their willingness to receive technical missions. At the time of writing (July 2006), no response had been received from Cambodia. The CITES Secretariat is facing difficulties in identifying suitable times at which orang-utan technical missions can be fitted into its work schedules but one to Indonesia has been undertaken.

Technical mission to Indonesia

7. A technical mission to Indonesia was conducted from 8 to 15 May 2006. The mission team was composed of Ms Melanie Virtue, Team Leader, GRASP, UNEP and Mr John M. Sellar, Senior Officer, Anti-smuggling, Fraud and Organized Crime, CITES Secretariat. Following a practice adopted for previous CITES technical enforcement-related missions, such as those referring to the illicit trade in caviar, ivory, Tibetan antelope and tigers, the CITES Secretariat wrote to the national CITES Management Authority of Indonesia identifying the aims of the mission, the type of activities the team would wish to undertake and the various organizations it would wish to consult. A draft programme was subsequently prepared and agreed with the mission team.
8. On its first day in the capital of Indonesia (Jakarta), the mission team met with and briefed the Minister of Forestry. It then participated in a seminar, organized by the CITES Management Authority, to which almost 70 persons had been invited. Representatives of Customs, the Forest Department, police, prosecution authorities, quarantine service, the wildlife trade association, media and NGOs were all present. Presentations were made by GRASP, the CITES Secretariat and the Forest Department of Indonesia on the aims of GRASP, illicit international trade in wildlife and national measures for the conservation of orang-utans respectively.
10. Thereafter, the mission team travelled to Kalimantan and Sumatra and visited orang-utan rescue and rehabilitation centres and met with government officials engaged in wildlife law enforcement and also NGOs which support such activities and general orang-utan conservation. The team also visited the airport and seaport of Medan in northern Sumatra. During the visit to the airport, a seminar was held for CITES, Customs, Forest Department and Quarantine Service staff, where presentations on GRASP and CITES were provided by the team. NGO representatives also attended this seminar.
11. The mission team identified a number of areas of serious concern in relation to the illicit trade in orang-utans and the response to this trade by the authorities in Indonesia. A 22-page report on the mission, incorporating a number of suggestions and recommendations, has been submitted to the Government of Indonesia. The report contains information that could be exploited by unscrupulous traders and criminals if these were discussed openly. Consequently, for the meantime, the team's report will not be made public.

Disposal of confiscated live orang-utans

12. Prior to its mission, the technical team was aware of several high-profile campaigns relating to the disposal of orang-utans that had been confiscated by non-range States or were suspected to have been illegally imported to non-range States. These campaigns called for the repatriation of such animals to Indonesia. This issue was also raised several times during the mission, by both government officials and representatives of NGOs.
13. The team has no wish to pre-judge what is undoubtedly a complex issue before it has a chance to conduct further missions. However, it believes it is important for the international community to be aware that, in the Kalimantan area of Indonesia alone, there are already over 900 orang-utans in 'rescue' and 'rehabilitation' centres. It seems highly unlikely that anything other than a small number

of these will ever be released into the wild. The team believes, therefore, that it is important that those who engage in calls for repatriation should be aware that the capacity of the government of Indonesia and the NGOs that are primarily responsible for operating most centres is already overstretched. The team's initial assessment is that, at times, it seems more attention is being given to repatriating animals as opposed to preventing their illegal export in the first place.

CITES Great Ape Enforcement Task Force

14. At SC53, the Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to look at ways in which a Great Ape Enforcement Task Force could be established. Funding support has since been obtained from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and it is intended that the Task Force, composed of representatives of great ape range and consumer States, should meet at UNEP headquarters in Gigiri, Kenya, in September 2006. The Secretariat has already entered into discussions with the GRASP Secretariat and relevant NGOs as to arrangements for the meeting. If the meeting takes place as expected, an oral report on the outcomes will be given to the Standing Committee.

Conclusion

15. The subject of great apes will be discussed during the 22nd meeting of the Animals Committee (Lima, July 2006; see document AC22 Doc. 18) and the Secretariat will report orally to the Standing Committee on any specific issues that emerge from the meeting. In the meantime, however, the Secretariat has no further matters to bring to the attention of the Committee on this subject. It will continue to seek opportunities to conduct further orang-utan technical missions and will report upon these and other issues relating to great apes at the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The Secretariat suggests that such a report could also serve as the report of the Standing Committee, which is required under Resolution Conf. 13.4.