

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

Tiger

ILLEGAL TRADE IN TIGERS

1. This document has been submitted by the United States of America.

Background

2. At its 10th meeting (Harare, 1997), the Conference of the Parties 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 for related activities”. In accordance with the Decision, in 1999 the CITES Tiger Missions Technical Team undertook a mission to 14 tiger range and consumer States. The Team assessed legislation and enforcement, anti-poaching efforts, public education and outreach, and other domestic controls, and its report was accepted by the Standing Committee at its 42nd meeting (Lisbon, September – October 1999). In addition, 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 at the 43rd meeting of the Standing Committee (Gigiri, April 2000).
3. At its 11th meeting (Gigiri, 2000), the Conference of the Parties established the CITES Tiger Enforcement Task Force (TETF), with the objective of combating illicit trade in tigers and tiger parts and derivatives. At its 13th meeting (Bangkok, 2004), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decision 13.22, which 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”.
4. At the 53rd meeting of the Standing Committee (Geneva, June – July 2005), the United States submitted document SC53 Doc. 17 on behalf of the North American region. In response to the document, China, India and Nepal provided reports on recent activities to combat illicit trade in specimens of Asian big cat species. In addition, the Secretariat summarized the outcome of a recent meeting of the TETF where, despite reports of significant seizures, concern was expressed regarding the continuing illicit trade in specimens of tiger.
5. The Standing Committee noted the reports and directed the Secretariat, in conjunction with the North American Wildlife Enforcement Group, to undertake an analysis of intelligence relating to the illegal trade in tigers and report on the subject at its 54th meeting. The Committee also requested all range States of Asian big cat species to submit reports relating to their work in combating illicit trade in specimens of Asian big cat species for review at its 54th meeting. The Committee indicated that, as appropriate, such reports should include information describing how the Parties have implemented the recommendations included in the 1999 CITES Tiger Missions Technical Team report.

Recommendations

6. The United States applauds recent education and law enforcement efforts by tiger range States aimed at addressing the illegal killing of and trade in tigers. However, we remain seriously concerned over the declining status of wild tiger populations, particularly relating to recent reports of critically low tiger population numbers in important range States. Adding up seized tiger skins, and whole skins and costumes constructed of skin pieces observed during an investigation in August 2005, one non-governmental organization estimated that it could account for 221 dead tigers between October 2003 and September 2005. In light of reports of serious declines in wild tiger populations, and the high degree of commercial threat posed by international demand for tiger parts, the United States recommends that the Standing Committee adopt the following recommendations:
 - a) At its 54th meeting, the Standing Committee should establish parameters that will be used to measure range State progress in combating international trade in tiger parts.
 - b) At least 60 days before the 55th meeting of the Standing Committee, all tiger range States should submit reports detailing their actions on outreach and enforcement regarding the illegal killing of and trade in tigers.
 - c) At its 55th meeting, the Standing Committee should review the reports submitted by the tiger range States. Based on the reports, other relevant information, and consultation with the CITES Secretariat and appropriate international expert organizations, and using the parameters established at its 54th meeting, if the Standing Committee determines that sufficient progress has not been made in combating international trade in tiger parts, it may recommend a suspension of commercial trade in all specimens of CITES-listed species from the identified Parties until such time as they are able to demonstrate substantial progress on this issue.
 - d) For those Parties identified by the Standing Committee as not having made sufficient progress on enforcement and outreach, the Secretariat should seek funding for and organize a diplomatic mission, possibly comprising the current and two past Chairmen of the Standing Committee and the Secretary-General of CITES, to elevate illegal tiger trade issues to the appropriate governmental levels in order to encourage the necessary political will and action to stop the illegal killing of and trade in tigers.