

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



Sixty-first meeting of the Standing Committee  
Geneva (Switzerland), 15-19 August 2011

Strategic matters

SECRETARY-GENERAL'S CERTIFICATES OF COMMENDATION

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At its 11th meeting (Gigiri, 2000), the Conference of the Parties to CITES adopted a *Strategic Vision through 2005* and set as one of its objectives "to stimulate and participate in bilateral, regional and global efforts to combat illegal trade in wild fauna and flora". In addition, it called on the Parties and the Secretariat to "formally recognize and award exemplary enforcement actions" in the related Action Plan.
3. Consequently, the Secretariat decided to create Certificates of Commendation, to be awarded at the discretion of the Secretary-General, and announced their introduction with Notification to the Parties No. 2002/014 of 6 March 2002.
4. The first such certificate was awarded in 2003 and certificates have been awarded on a total of eight occasions since. Details of all certificates awarded are placed on the CITES website. (See [http://www.cites.org/eng/disc/certificate\\_commend.shtml](http://www.cites.org/eng/disc/certificate_commend.shtml)) These certificates appear to be highly appreciated by the law enforcement community and those who support wildlife law enforcement. The certificates are usually presented personally by the Secretary-General to the recipients. However, where this is not possible, they are presented by a senior member of the Secretariat, or may be presented to representatives of the recipient's country.
5. Leaving the decision to award such certificates with the Secretary-General has provided a useful degree of flexibility and avoided formal nomination or judging procedures. Based upon its experience, the Secretariat is of the view that establishing strict criteria is not particularly desirable. Since illegal trade in wildlife constantly evolves, as does the law enforcement response, equally evolving and flexible criteria have been established in determining in what circumstances a certificate should be awarded or who may be a recipient. However, the Secretariat decided in 2010 to further refine the matters taken into account in awarding a certificate and to include them on the CITES website.
6. The Secretary-General takes into account the following circumstances in awarding a certificate:
  - a) Particularly significant seizures of wildlife (a simple seizure of wildlife contraband by border control officers would not, in itself, warrant the award of a certificate, regardless of the quantity or rarity of the animals or plants involved. However, if the seizure had necessitated those involved uncovering a particularly sophisticated method of concealment, or offered lessons that others might learn from, then an award may be considered);
  - b) Conduct by law enforcement officials that has gone beyond what might reasonably be expected of those whose daily task it is to enforce the provisions of CITES, including acts of bravery;
  - c) Complex investigations resulting in significant arrests, prosecutions, or disruption of criminal networks;
  - d) The use of innovative investigative techniques, such as controlled delivery operations or anti-money laundering work;

- e) The bringing to justice of those responsible for serious wildlife crime, exemplary law enforcement penalization (e.g. innovative or significant sentences), marked reductions in illegal trade, or actions leading to improvements in the conservation status of species;
  - f) Exemplary inter-agency coordination and collaboration at the local, regional or international level;
  - g) Long-term commitment on the part of individuals to wildlife law enforcement, of an outstanding nature that is especially worthy of recognition; and
  - h) Activities undertaken by individuals or organizations that significantly promote or contribute to the general enforcement of the Convention.
7. The Secretariat believes there is scope for introducing a similar scheme for those who have supported the work of the Convention in other fields, and in particular in the areas of management (in the sense of implementation of the Convention) or science. Once again, the Secretariat would not intend to establish strict criteria but has the following in mind as instances where recognition might be appropriate, for example in the case of science:
- a) Development of innovative and effective techniques for non-detriment findings;
  - b) Sharing of results and promotion of the exchange of good practice which has had widespread benefit for the CITES scientific community, either on a regional or global level;
  - c) Long-term commitment on the part of individuals or organizations to science in CITES, of an outstanding nature that is especially worthy of recognition;
  - d) Outstanding contributions to scientific capacity-building, particularly in exporting Parties; and
  - e) Contributions to the amendment of the Appendices in a way that sets a particularly high scientific standard or that has made a major contribution to the alignment of the Appendices with the conservation needs of the species.
8. The use of the term 'certificate of commendation' is well known in the enforcement community but it may not be as appropriate for other areas, such as science or management. The Secretariat believes that the term 'certificate of merit' is a preferable alternative.

#### Recommendation

9. If the Standing Committee supports expanding the current scope of certificates of commendation to recognize exemplary performance in management and science, the Secretariat will move to introduce such a scheme. In doing so, it will follow the same *modus operandi* as is used for recognizing exemplary enforcement actions.