

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

Sixty-sixth meeting of the Standing Committee  
Geneva (Switzerland), 11-15 January 2016

Administrative and financial matters

Administration and finance

ORGANIZATION OF SPECIAL MEETINGS

Background

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.
2. At the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP16, Bangkok, 2013), the Central African Republic and Rwanda submitted document [CoP16 Doc. 9 \(Rev. 1\)](#) on *Arrangements for meetings*. It expressed concerns that the rules regarding the arrangements for meetings of the Conference of the Parties and the permanent committees do not apply to other meetings organized by the Secretariat. The document contained a draft resolution entitled "Guidelines on meetings organized or funded by the CITES Secretariat".
3. During the discussion of the document at CoP16, the Secretariat stated that it did not support the adoption of the draft resolution, noting that no other multilateral environmental agreement was subject to such guidelines for non-official meetings and that implementation of those proposed in the draft resolution would have budgetary implications. Following bilateral consultation, the proponents withdrew the document, stating that, following discussion with the Secretariat, they were satisfied that concerns regarding the organization of special meetings could be addressed through the consideration of suggestions at the 65th meeting of the Standing Committee [see summary records [CoP16 Com. II Rec. 1 \(Rev. 1\)](#) and [CoP16 Com. II Rec. 5](#)].
4. At the 65th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC65), the Secretariat presented document [SC65 Doc. 12](#) welcoming the comments and suggestions of the members of the Standing Committee and other Parties to identify the concerns to be addressed. "The Committee agreed that the Secretariat should provide a document on the subject for the 66th meeting of the Committee following discussions with a consultative group, and noted that interested Parties should send their comments to the Secretariat. It also agreed that the consultative group would comprise Botswana and Niger." (see [SC65 summary record](#), agenda item 12)
5. The Secretariat notes that, at its 16th meeting, the Conference of the Parties has not allocated any funds for the "organization of other CITES workshops and meetings" (see [Annex 1 of Resolution Conf. 16.2](#)). As such, all special meetings, understood as all meetings organized by the Secretariat with the exception of the Conference of the Parties, the Standing Committee, the Animals Committee and the Plants Committee, are organized with external funding from donors. Planning for travel and accommodation, submission, translation and distribution of documents for these special meetings depends thus on whether donors have made the necessary provisions to fund these services and whether the funds have been disbursed in a timely manner to the Secretariat.
6. However, the Secretariat aims to always achieve the highest level of service for all its meetings and proposes to remind donors of the following elements for the organization of special meetings:

- a) provision of a translation budget in three languages, especially for meetings held in regions where most Parties use French or Spanish as an official language;
  - b) disbursement of the funds at least 90 days prior to the special meeting to ensure the timely submissions, distribution and translation of documents to be considered at the special meeting and the timely communication of information about travel and accommodation arrangements in order to comply with the United Nations rules and regulations that specify that travel requests should be submitted at least 21 calendar days prior to the trip start date.
7. The Secretariat consulted the consultative group established by the Standing Committee at its 65th meeting composed of Central African Republic, Mali and Rwanda (the proponents of document CoP16 Doc. 9 (Rev. 1), Botswana, Niger and Colombia.
8. The consultative group provided the following comments:
- a) Niger proposed that the Standing Committee submit a draft resolution to the COP stipulating that the Secretariat should cancel special meetings when no funds for interpretation and translation is secured and limit the organization of special meetings to situations when sufficient funds are available to ensure that non-English speakers are at an equal footing and are provided the means to participate fully. (see full comments in Annex 1)
  - b) Colombia recognized the importance of having a budget for interpretation and translation for special meetings, especially for those focusing on key issues. It further agreed with the Secretariat's proposal, noting how difficult it is to determine in advance the budgetary and workload implications of the organization of special meetings. (see full comments in Annex 2)

#### Recommendation

9. Based on the comments of the consultative group and the proposal in paragraph 6, the Secretariat recommends that the Conference of the Parties, at its 17th meeting, be invited to include an extra paragraph in Resolution Conf. 17.X on *Financing and the costed programme of work for the Secretariat for the triennium 2017-2019*, which would read as follows:

*ENCOURAGES donors funding special meetings organized by the Secretariat to include provisions for translation of meeting documents into the working languages of the Convention (especially for meetings held in regions where most Parties use French or Spanish as an official language) and to disburse funds to the Secretariat in sufficient time prior to the special meeting to ensure the timely submissions, distribution and translation of documents and communication of information about travel and accommodation arrangements.*

### **Comments from Niger**

Thank you very much for your submission regarding the way forward on the organization of special meetings. The government of Niger has carefully reviewed the document prepared by the CITES Secretariat and we really appreciate the time and effort put towards the resolution of this issue.

As a French-speaking country, and speaking on behalf of the region with the most French-speaking CITES Parties, Niger is very eager to ensure that French translation and interpretation is a priority for the organization of special meetings convened by the CITES Secretariat. Convening a meeting without providing Parties with the adequate means to prepare for and understand the discussions properly would be unthinkable.

While understanding the financial constraints that are linked to organizing translation and interpretation for a specific meeting, we remain of the view that without translation or interpretation, meetings convening Parties where English is not the first language should not be organized. We therefore recommend that our working group propose that the Standing Committee submit a draft resolution to the COP stipulating that the Secretariat should cancel special meetings when no funds for interpretation and translation is secured and limit the organization of special meetings to situations when sufficient funds are available to ensure that non-English speakers are at an equal footing and are provided the means to participate fully.

We ask that these comments appear in the document submitted by the Secretariat to SC66 on behalf of this working group.

### Comments from Colombia

In response to document CoP16 Doc. 9 (Guidelines on meetings organized or funded by the CITES Secretariat), the Secretariat proposes that the following paragraph be included in Resolution Conf. 17.X on Financing and the costed programme of work for the Secretariat for the triennium 2017-2019:

**ENCOURAGES donors funding any special meetings organized by the Secretariat to include provisions for translation of the meeting documents into the working languages of the Convention (particularly, meetings held in regions where most Parties use French or Spanish as their official language), and to disburse funds to the Secretariat sufficiently in advance to ensure the prompt submission, distribution, and translation of documents, and timely communication of travel arrangements and accommodation.**

It is acknowledged that it would be convenient and pertinent to establish some rules in this regard. However, this might prove difficult given that the meetings in question are special meetings and are not provided for in the budget allocated for official meetings. Further, it would require budgets to be already in place, which is not the case, and might even be contrary to existing provisions, such as:

**Resolution Conf. 4.6 (Rev. CoP15): the Conference of the Parties DECIDES that any draft resolutions or decisions submitted for consideration at a meeting of the Conference of the Parties that have budgetary and workload implications for the Secretariat or permanent committees must contain or be accompanied by a budget for the work involved and an indication of the source of funding.**

Therefore, if such strict rules were to be established by the Conference of the Parties without taking into consideration the possible implications (such as additional staff, budget, etc.), it could mean that any such special meetings would be more complicated to organize than previously. Thus, it might be worthwhile to consider reviewing how such special meetings are decided and organized in order to ensure prioritization of the more relevant issues and optimal use of limited resources.

The same situation occurs with regard to the translation of documents; accordingly, until such times as a budget allocation is made for this purpose, the most appropriate solution would be as proposed by the Secretariat in the above paragraph.