

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

DEVELOPMENT OF TIMBER IDENTIFICATION GUIDANCE

1. This document has been prepared by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and is submitted by the Secretariat in relation to agenda item 16.5 on the *International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime* and agenda item 21 on the report of the Chair of the Plants Committee. This document provides a summary of the ongoing work lead by UNODC within the framework of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime¹ (ICCWC) to strengthen the development and use of tools and technologies to address illicit trafficking of timber.

Background

2. The resolution '*Crime prevention and criminal justice responses to illicit trafficking in protected species of wild fauna and flora*' adopted by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC Resolution 2013/40), encourages UNODC, in cooperation with ICCWC, to continue its efforts to provide technical assistance to combat illicit trafficking in wild fauna and flora.
3. The resolution '*Strengthening a targeted crime prevention and criminal justice response to combat illicit trafficking in timber and forest products*' (Resolution 23/1), adopted by Member States during the 23rd Session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ), invites UNODC to strengthen 'the development of tools and technologies for addressing illicit trafficking in forest products, including timber' and to 'promote enforcement related to illicit trafficking in forest products, including timber'.
4. Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) voted unanimously to bring 293 new timber species under CITES control at the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP16, Bangkok, March 2013) to ensure legal, sustainable and traceable trade in timber and non-timber forest products.
5. In Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. Cop16) on *Compliance and enforcement*, the Conference of the Parties in paragraph i) under *Regarding additional actions to promote enforcement*, recommends that Parties promote and increase the use of forensic technology in the investigation of wildlife crime offences.
6. A number of Decisions adopted at CoP16 encourage the increased use of forensic analysis to support the implementation and enforcement of CITES. These include among others Decision 16.78 paragraph b) and 16.83 on *Monitoring of illegal trade in ivory and other elephant specimens (Elephantidae spp.)*, Decisions 16.84 paragraph d) and 16.89 paragraph b) on *Rhinoceroses (Rhinocerotidae spp.)*, Decision 16.102, paragraph b) on *Snake trade and conservation management (Serpentes spp.)* and Decision 16.136 paragraph a) i) on *Sturgeons and paddlefish (Acipenseriformes spp.)*. Further to the above, the Standing Committee at its 65th meeting (SC65,

¹ ICCWC is the collaborative effort of five inter-governmental organizations working to bring coordinated support to the national wildlife law enforcement agencies and to the sub-regional and regional networks that, on a daily basis, act in defense of natural resources. The ICCWC partners are the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora Secretariat, INTERPOL, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the World Bank and the World Customs Organization. For more details on ICCWC please see SC66 Doc 16.5 or visit the ICCWC webportal on <https://cites.org/eng/prog/iccwc.php>

Geneva, July 2014), in relation to document SC65 Doc. 42.1, agreed Recommendations e) and f) on *Elephant conservation, illegal killing and ivory trade*, on forensics.

Activities conducted to date

7. To strengthen the development and use of tools and technologies to address illicit trafficking of timber, UNODC recognised the need, as a first step, to consider the applicability of available scientific methods for timber identification in support of law enforcement operations and to ensure that a standardized approach is in place through the whole process from the crime scene to the court room.
8. A background paper produced by UNODC provides an overview of the existing scientific methodologies available for timber identification, discusses the suitability of each method as screening and diagnostic tools and the questions each can potentially answer. Additionally, it considers issues relevant to all identification methodologies, namely those of underlying variation, taxonomy, reference material, and the transition of techniques from research methods to forensic tools.
9. The transnational and organized nature of timber trafficking necessitates a common and coordinated global response. UNODC, in cooperation with ICCWC partners, convened an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Timber Analysis in Vienna in December 2014 to consider what is required at national, regional, and international levels to address the entire timber trafficking crime chain, challenges associated with timber identification and the use of standardised methodologies; and to engage international expertise.
10. The EGM brought together law enforcement and scientific communities with expert participants from various national agencies, forensic and research scientists, front line law enforcement officials and legal experts. The meeting highlighted the need to discuss and address the process and practicalities of the different areas of work and related expertise required, the challenges specific to timber identification, and the necessity for increased communication and cooperation. A Conference Room Paper was presented by UNODC to the 24th Session of the CCPCJ in May 2015, detailing the outcomes of the EGM and the scientific recommendations produced (CN.15/2015/CRP.4²). This Conference Room Paper was also made available to Parties at the 22nd meeting of the CITES Plants Committee (PC22, Georgia, October 2015), as Annex 1 to document PC22 Doc. 14.2 (Rev. 1)³.
11. UNODC under the auspices of ICCWC, continues to lead this collaborative work with subject matter experts, with the aim of developing a timber identification guide. This was further discussed at a second EGM convened in Vienna in October 2015. The guide that is being developed will address the entire chain of custody, and include information on the collection, analysis and interpretation of forensic timber identification evidence. The work being conducted will also explore options for further development of forensic best practices to provide evidence-based information, in support of law enforcement investigations and successful prosecutions.
12. The EGM participants prepared recommendations to improve timber identification of CITES listed and look-alike species. UNODC reported on the development of the timber identification guide and the EGM recommendations at PC22. The Plants Committee supported the work undertaken by UNODC to improve identification of CITES-listed tree species, and recognized the importance for the Committee to provide assistance in this regard. The Committee invited UNODC to bring this issue to the attention of the Standing Committee at its 66th meeting, as reflected in document SC66 Doc. 21 on *Report of the Chair of the Plants Committee*⁴, discussed during the present meeting.
13. UNODC will continue to work closely with its ICCWC partners and subject matter experts to continue making progress in the work of timber identification. The UNODC will work closely with the CITES Secretariat with the aim of developing draft decisions for submission and adoption at the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP 17, Johannesburg, 2016).

² https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CCPCJ/CCPCJ_Sessions/CCPCJ_24/ECN152015_CRP4_e_V1503347.pdf

³ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/pc/22/E-PC22-14-02-R1.pdf>

⁴ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/66/E-SC66-21.pdf>