CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA
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Seventy-third meeting of the Standing Committee
Online, 5-7 May 2021

Strategic matters

LANGUAGE STRATEGY FOR THE CONVENTION

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat.

2. At its 18th meeting (CoP18, Geneva, 2019), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decision 18.30 on *Language strategy for the Convention* as follows:

    18.30   Directed to the Standing Committee

    The Standing Committee shall, with the assistance of the Secretariat:

    a) *consider implications of adding Arabic, Chinese and Russian to the working languages of the Convention, including for the administration, budget, implementation and effectiveness of the Convention;*

    b) *particularly consider benefits and challenges specific to adding each one of these languages as working languages of the Convention, taking note of document CoP18 Doc. 8 on* Draft resolution on language strategy for the Convention *and of United Nations General Assembly resolution 71/328 on* Multilingualism*; and*

    c) *report its conclusions and recommendations to the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.*

3. On 28 September 2020, the Standing Committee agreed to request the Secretariat to prepare an analysis of the issues and tasked the Finance and Budget Subcommittee to provide advice to the Standing Committee based on the analysis prepared by the Secretariat. The present document responds to this request and is structured as follows:

    a) cost implications of adding Arabic, Chinese and Russian as working languages of the Convention;

    b) an overview of the benefits and challenges of adding Arabic, Chinese and Russian for CITES Parties; and

    c) a proposed strategy to identify documents that would need to be translated in Arabic, Chinese and Russian in order to facilitate and improve the implementation of the Convention by Management and Scientific Authorities.

4. As noted by the Secretariat in its comments on document CoP18 Doc. 8, the proposal to include Arabic, Russian and Chinese as working languages of the Convention would have significant cost implications and would require additional core funding for language services and human resources within the Secretariat, if adopted.

5. In the respective Rules of Procedure, Parties have decided that, for the Conference of the Parties and its permanent committees, the working languages of the Convention are English, French and Spanish. Should Arabic, Chinese and Russian be added as working languages, these Rules of Procedure would need to be amended.

6. Based on the adopted Rules of Procedure, the Secretariat has received financial resources to provide for language services and human resources to cover the three working languages within the Secretariat and for the Convention for the triennium budgets. The total cost of USD 2,479,136 linked to the provision of languages services for the triennium 2020-2022 in English, French and Spanish can be found in Resolution Conf. 18.1 on *Financing and the costed programme of work for the Secretariat for the triennium 2020-2022*, as per below details:

> Translation services: USD 1,235,000
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> Interpretation services to CoP, SC, AC and PC: USD 426,900
>
> Human resources (1 P-3 Documentation Officer at 75% and one Documents Assistant at 100%): USD 817,236

7. If three additional working languages were to be introduced, further core funded resources for the triennium 2023-2025 would be required for translation, interpretation and human resources. To get an estimate of additional human resources, the Secretariat consulted other Secretariats of Conventions with six official languages. An increase by one Documents Assistant at 100% and an Information Technology Assistant at 50% to maintain the website in three additional languages would be necessary within the Secretariat to process the documents for meetings. The cost of the functioning of the Convention in six languages would amount to around USD 4.91 million per triennium (based on current pricing) as per below details:

> Translation services: USD 2,470,000
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> Interpretation services to CoP, SC, AC and PC: USD 853,800
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> Human resources (1 P-3 at 75% and 2.5 General Service): USD 1,451,703
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> Development of the CITES website in three additional languages: USD 15,000
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> Translation cost of Resolutions and Decisions and of the CITES website in three additional languages: USD 146,000
>
> Internal transaction cost for the Secretariat to operate in additional languages: not costed

8. The Secretariat believes that the transaction costs for the Secretariat to operate in three additional languages should not be underestimated. The volume of decisions and documentation produced by and for CITES meetings keeps increasing (see document CoP18 Doc. 7.1) and the inclusion of three additional working languages would strain existing human resources and would impact other services, including the staff in charge of human resources, maintenance of the website and communications, among others.

Arabic, Chinese and Russian among CITES Parties

9. The Secretariat acknowledges the value of increasing the number of working languages of the Convention by including Arabic, Chinese and Russian. Arabic is the official language in 24 Parties and spoken by over 400 million people among the CITES Parties. Chinese is the official language in two countries and spoken by over 1.3 billion people[1] and Russian is the official language in four Parties and spoken by over 150 million

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[1] At the 73rd meeting of the Standing Committee, China asked for the number of Chinese speakers worldwide to be corrected from 900 million to 1.3 billion.

people. The introduction of Arabic and Russian as working languages would benefit a significant number of Parties, while the introduction of Chinese would benefit the greatest number of individuals.

10. From a practical perspective, the Secretariat notes that some key texts are already available in Arabic, Chinese and Russian. According to Article XXV of the Convention, the original text of the Convention exists in Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish and each of these versions shall be equally authentic. At its 16th meeting (Bangkok, 2013), the Conference of the Parties agreed that, at the next extraordinary meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the Secretariat should propose an amendment to the Convention in order to adopt an official text of the Convention in Arabic [see paragraph 3 d) of Resolution Conf. 4.6 (Rev. CoP18) on *Submission of draft resolutions, draft decisions and other documents for meetings of the Conference of the Parties*].

11. The Secretariat notes that, in preparation for a training workshop for Management and Scientific Authorities from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on CITES implementation that was held from 22 to 25 May 2018 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, some key Resolutions were translated into Russian: Resolution Conf. 8.4 (Rev. CoP15) on *National laws for implementation of the Convention*, Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP18) on *Permits and certificates*, Resolution Conf. 16.7 (Rev. CoP17) on *Non-detriment findings*, Resolution Conf. 17.6 on *Prohibiting, preventing, detecting and countering corruption, which facilitates activities conducted in violation of the Convention* and Resolution Conf. 17.8 on *Disposal of illegally traded and confiscated specimens of CITES-listed species* (without the annexes). These are unofficial translations that would need to be revised prior to posting on the CITES website.

12. The Secretariat is also aware that the CITES national authorities of China have translated all Resolutions and Decisions as well as latest Appendices into the Chinese language from English after each CoP in order to facilitate national implementation.

Proposed language strategy

13. As outlined in the first section of this document, adding Arabic, Chinese and Russian as working languages of the Convention would have significant cost implications for Parties amounting to an additional USD 2.43 million over each triennium. However, due to the number of Parties (and individuals) speaking those languages and in the spirit of multilingualism enshrined in United Nations General Assembly resolution 71/328, the implementation of the Convention would be facilitated if more documents were available in Arabic, Chinese and Russian.

14. If financial constraints precluded the inclusion of Arabic, Chinese and Russian as working languages of the Convention, the Secretariat believes that nevertheless a tiered incremental approach focusing on key documents that are essential to the work of national authorities could respond to the sentiments expressed in document CoP18 Doc. 8 and improve the implementation of the Convention in the 22 Parties mentioned in paragraph 9 of the present document:

Document (in order of priority)	Arabic	Chinese	Russian
Convention text	Missing	Done	Done
Current Resolutions	Missing	Done – to be uploaded on the CITES website	Partly done – to be revised, completed and uploaded on the CITES website
Current Decisions	Missing	Done – to be uploaded on the CITES website	Missing
Other key documents for identification, enforcement, etc.	To be identified with the help of Parties	To be identified with the help of Parties	To be identified with the help of Parties

The table above only contains those documents that the Secretariat is aware are available in Arabic, Chinese and Russian. Parties that have translated CITES documents in those and other languages are also invited to share those with the Secretariat.

15. The first step of a possible tiered incremental approach would be to identify those documents that have already been translated in Arabic, Chinese and Russian and to publish them on the CITES website. The second step would be to identify key documents, namely the Convention and current Resolutions, and obtain

external funding to have them translated in any language where they are missing. Due to the high number of Resolutions to be translated (100 valid Resolutions in 2020), it may be prudent to start with the following Resolutions that are essential to the work of Management and Scientific Authorities and to understanding how CITES operates such as:

- Resolution Conf. 8.4 (Rev. CoP15) on *National laws for implementation of the Convention*
- Resolution 10.3 on *Designation and role of the Scientific Authorities*
- Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP18) on *Compliance and enforcement*
- Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev. CoP18) on *National reports*
- Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP18) on *Permits and certificates*
- Resolution Conf. 12.8 (Rev. CoP18) on *Review of Significant Trade in specimens of Appendix-II species*
- Resolution Conf. 14.3 (Rev. CoP18) on *CITES compliance procedures*
- Resolution Conf. 16.7 (Rev. CoP17) on *Non-detriment findings*,
- Resolution Conf. 17.8 on *Disposal of illegally traded and confiscated specimens of CITES-listed species*
- Resolution Conf. 18.2 on *Establishment of committees*
- Resolution Conf. 18.3 on *CITES Strategic Vision: 2021-2030*
- Resolution Conf. 18.6 on *Designation and role of Management Authorities*
- Resolution Conf. 18.7 on *Legal acquisition findings*

16. The list above is of course non-exhaustive and is just a starting point. If a specific resolution is of particular importance for a specific constituency, then that document would be included in the priority list. For example, if several Parties that have Russian as an official language wish to register captive-breeding operations, then Resolution Conf. 12.10 (Rev. CoP15) on *Registration of operations that breed Appendix-I animal species in captivity for commercial purposes* should be translated into Russian as a priority. Similarly, if several Parties that have Arabic as an official language are part of the Review of Significant Trade process, then Resolution Conf. 12.8 (Rev. CoP18) on *Review of Significant Trade in specimens of Appendix-II species* should be translated into Arabic as a priority.

17. As a third step, other documents, such as identification or enforcement documents could be translated in relevant target languages. For instance, the *CITES cheetah trade resource kit,* due to the interest of Arabic-speaking countries in the issue, could be translated into Arabic. Another example is the *Guidelines for inspection of captive-breeding and ranching facilities* and the *Guide to the application of CITES source codes* that has already been translated into Chinese. Depending on the subject matter and at the request of Parties, some other documents could be translated in Arabic, Chinese or Russian.

Conclusions

18. The Finance and Budget Subcommittee can consider two options for a language strategy: the complete integration of Arabic, Chinese and Russian as languages of the Convention at an estimated cost of USD 2.43 million for the triennium or an incremental language strategy that aims to identify, with the help of interested Parties, those documents that should be translated as a priority in order to facilitate the daily implementation work of their national authorities. For the complete integration of Arabic, Chinese and Russian as languages of the Convention, Parties would need to increase the operational budget under the General Trust Fund (CTL) by 13% for the triennium. For the incremental language strategy, the translation into Arabic of the text of the Convention and of all Resolutions and Decisions in Arabic and Russian would be subject to the availability of external funding.

19. The Finance and Budget and Subcommittee was invited to:

a) make a recommendation to the Standing Committee based on the two options laid out in paragraph 18 above; or

b) propose an alternative language strategy to the Standing Committee.

Recommendations

20. Taking into account the recommendations of the Finance and Budget Subcommittee, the Standing Committee is invited to formulate a way forward for the implementation of Decision 18.30 on *Language strategy for the Convention.*