

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



Informal briefing of the Standing Committee
Online, 22 March 2024, 12.00-13.00 (CET)

AIDE-MEMOIRE

1. Welcome by the Chair of the Standing Committee and the CITES Secretary-General

The Chair of the Standing Committee (United States of America), Rosemarie Gnam, and the Secretary-General, Ivonne Higuero, opened the meeting and welcomed Representatives and alternate Representatives of the Standing Committee (SC) to the informal briefing. The SC Chair thanked the Secretariat for the initiative of calling the briefing and congratulated the Committee on the important progress at its 77th meeting despite the significant challenges with the overloaded agenda. The Chair explained that the main purpose of the informal briefing was to provide information on the latest developments regarding the organization of the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP20), to explain the steps the Secretariat proposes to take next and seek guidance from the Standing Committee on this and the way forward on managing the SC's agenda for its 78th meeting.

2. Host of CoP20

The Secretary-General informed the Committee that, despite numerous consultations and discussions with potential hosts, no Party had made a formal offer to host the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

The Secretary-General recalled that, at its 77th meeting (SC77; Geneva, November 2023), the Committee had agreed to *request the Secretariat to organize the 20th meeting of the Conference of the Parties as per Resolution Conf. 19.1, paragraph 32 a), if no candidate host country is known by 31st March 2024, and to initiate fundraising for costs associated with the organization and to propose alternative approaches to funding future CoPs for review* (see summary record SC77 SR, page 3).

Due to the absence of any formal offer to host, she said the Secretariat has been exploring options to organize the CoP in Geneva and informally consulted with possible venues in Geneva. The Secretariat has estimated the costs of organizing CoP20 in Geneva, based on the costs of CoP19. The total estimated amount required is around USD 1,8 million to USD 2 million. However, the actual amount would only be known later following the formal procurement process of a venue and the associated service providers. The Secretary-General suggested that the Finance and Budget Subcommittee (FBSC) be convened to assist the Secretariat in identifying the necessary resources for organizing the CoP and noted that the funds must be available by the end of 2024 for the Secretariat to make the necessary contractual arrangements.

This could include:

- Additional fundraising from Parties and other stakeholders e.g. through a Notification to the Parties;
- Partial use of the core trust fund balance resources.

The Secretary-General reminded the SC that since a Chair had not been elected for the Subcommittee, the Secretariat would convene the meeting. The FBSC would then submit its recommendations to the Standing Committee that would need to approve them.

Israel enquired about the cost of the organization of CoP20 in Geneva as they recalled that CoP18 in 2019 cost less than the estimate provided by the Secretariat. The Secretary-General noted that the cost of CoP18 had been around USD 1.2 million and that the venue had been provided at a 50% discount due to ongoing construction work at Palexpo during that period. She further noted that costs had gone up around the world due to inflation since 2019 and that Panama had spent USD 7 million to organize CoP19 in Panama City in 2022.

New Zealand expressed support for the inclusion of a reserve in the core budget to cover at least partly the organization of the CoP and enquired as to what was already included in the budget for 2023-2025 for the organization of the CoP. The Secretary-General explained that a budget line for the organization of the CoP provided only for interpretation, report-writing, translation and printing, costs that would need to be borne by the Secretariat regardless of the venue of the CoP.

New Zealand further noted that the Oceania region would not support the Secretariat's suggestion in the background document to explore the idea of a system of rotating the responsibility for hosting the CoP among the CITES regions, highlighting the limited capabilities to host in their region.

Kenya inquired as to what type of costs would need to be covered by additional resources. The Secretary-General explained that additional funding would be needed to secure a venue big enough to accommodate Committee I and Committee II that need to meet at the same time and within a short distance from each other; a voting system and all technical services and equipment needed for the adequate running of the meeting.

The United States of America supported the way forward proposed by the Secretary-General and the convening of the Finance and Budget Subcommittee to look at the funding implications of the organization of CoP20 in Geneva.

Israel further inquired as to whether there would be a cut-off date when it would be too late for a Party to offer to host because the Secretariat has already committed resources in Geneva. The Secretary-General indicated that such a date would only be known after formal procurement procedures have been started by the United Nations Office in Geneva; she also noted that the procurement procedures would entail costs even if they were interrupted because an offer from a host was accepted later.

The Chair invited the Secretariat to take note of the comments made as they go ahead with the planning of CoP20 in Geneva. She also encouraged Parties that are members of the FBSC to consider the election of a Chair of the FBSC as a priority.

3. Lessons learned from the 77th meeting of the Standing Committee

The Chair recalled that after SC77, the Secretariat had sent out an online survey and asked the open question: *Do you have any suggestion on how to deal with the increasingly large agenda of the meeting, and associated time constraints?* The Secretariat had received 73 anonymous responses from Parties and observers providing *inter alia* the following comments and suggestions:

- More time is required: increase the duration of the meeting (more days and/or more time each day).
- Better management of time in plenary: introductions and interventions should be limited to two minutes throughout the meeting; more issues could be considered in working groups; provide opportunities for Parties to provide comments and editorial changes in writing in advance of the meeting; don't open the floor for non-critical items/documents to be noted; avoid repeated congratulatory messages.
- Online discussions: consider conducting part of the meeting online to advance discussions on some agenda items prior to the meeting.
- Document management: explore the possibility of consolidating certain documents; consider submitting certain documents as information documents rather than working documents; ensure that documents are submitted earlier.
- Manage the number of agenda items: the CoP should reduce the number of issues to be discussed.

The Chair of the Standing Committee indicated that she had gone through the responses of the survey and was thinking of limiting the length of interventions to 2 to 3 minutes from the outset of SC78. She further invited the views of the Standing Committee Members on the above ideas to better manage the agenda of SC78.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, echoed by Brazil, Kuwait, New Zealand, Switzerland and the United States of America, supported the proposed time limit on intervention but called for greater flexibility for those Parties directly involved in an agenda item, such as for compliance cases.

The United Kingdom, echoed by Switzerland, also asked that any items or documents that would simply be noted should be flagged as such at the beginning of the meeting. New Zealand further noted that, for some working groups documents that were noted at SC77, guidance from the Standing Committee would have been helpful.

Switzerland suggested that Parties that are part of a compliance process could submit any additional information as information documents, thus allowing them to refer to this information during their intervention.

Kuwait further suggested that compliance cases that were not concluded at a Standing Committee meeting could be considered at CoP meetings when all concerned Parties are present. The Secretariat recalled that Annex 1 to Resolution Conf. 18.2 on *Establishment of committees* had directed the Standing Committee to handle general and specific compliance matters.

Brazil noted that the length of the agenda of the Standing Committee is directly linked to the number of Decisions adopted by the Parties at CoP meetings and recalled that the Parties were responsible for addressing this issue at the next CoP.

The United States of America suggested that working group chairs could be supported by the Secretariat if they wished to convene online meetings in order to have robust discussions before SC78. They also suggested that an online informal meeting of the Standing Committee could be convened before SC78 to go over documentation and identify documents for noting. New Zealand cautioned against the organization of substantive meetings online, due to the issue of time zones and their effect on participation.

The SC Chair noted the support for a time limit on interventions at SC78, while at the same time allowing for more flexibility for compliance cases, as well as the call for work to be done as much as possible before SC78, be it via online meetings, Notifications to collect views or information documents. She noted that one day had already been added to SC78 that will run from Monday through Saturday and noted that this increased the costs of the meeting by USD 10-15,000 and invited the Secretariat to bring the matter to the attention of the FBSC. She called on working group chairs to conclude their work as quickly as possible to allow for advanced discussions and asked for the Standing Committee Members' cooperation and collaboration in order to manage the agenda of SC78.

4. Closing

In closing the briefing, the SC Chair, joined by the Secretary-General, thanked Members for their presence and engagement.

Participant list

AFRICA	
Morocco	Hayat Mesbah
Madagascar	Eric Robsomanitrاندراسانا
Kenya	Patrick Omondi
	Solomon Kyalo
	Monicah Njeri Njogu
Chad	ABSENT
Senegal (alternate)	ABSENT
Zambia (alternate)	Lusizi Mary Mwale
United Republic of Tanzania (alternate)	Elisante Ombeni Leguma
Democratic Republic of the Congo (alternate)	ABSENT
ASIA	
Indonesia	Esfandri Nurbi
	Raditya Prihardianto
	Representative 1
Kuwait	Shereefa Al-Salem
Japan	Mariko Watanabe
	Yasuyuki Konayashi
India (alternate)	Representative 1
	Representative 2
Singapore (alternate)	Xie Renhui
	Hazelina Yeo
China (alternate)	Motong Li
	Chenming Shi
CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN	
Brazil	Angelo Paulo Sales dos Santos
	Larissa Karydakakis
Honduras	ABSENT
Dominican Republic	Nelson Garcia Marcano
Ecuador (alternate)	ABSENT
Nicaragua (alternate)	ABSENT
Cuba (alternate)	Viana Victoria Barcelo Perez
EUROPE	
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Kristopher Blake
	Caroline Daisley
	Madison Jay
Georgia	Teona Karchava
Belgium	Miet Van Looy
	Elke Malfait
	Sarah Van Staen
Poland	Karol Wolnicki
	Wojciech Piwowarski
Belarus (alternate)	ABSENT
Israel (alternate)	Simon Nemtzov
	Yatir Shamir
Spain (alternate)	Carolina San Martin Hernandez
Ireland (alternate)	Niamh O'Keeffe
	Den O'Rourke
NORTH AMERICA	
United States of America (SC Chair)	Rosemarie Gnam
	Naimah Aziz
	Annie Arbuthnot
	Shireen Yousef
	Ashley Kennedy
Canada (alternate)	Carolina Caceres
	Lise Jubinville
	Erin Down

OCEANIA	
New Zealand	Sarah Bagnall
Australia (alternate)	Rhedyn Ollerenshaw
DEPOSITARY	
Switzerland	Matthias Lörtscher
PREVIOUS HOST COUNTRY	
Panama	ABSENT