

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



Fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties
The Hague (Netherlands), 3-15 June 2007

Summary record of the first plenary session

03 June 2007: 15h00-16h30

Secretariat: Willem Wijnstekers

UNEP: Shafqat Kakakhel

Rapporteurs: J. Caldwell
P. de Angelis

Welcoming addresses and opening of the meeting

The Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, Ms Gerda Verburg, offered her appreciation to the Government of Thailand for hosting the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties and noted that the Hague was pleased to host the current meeting as it would contribute to the Dutch tradition of hosting international meetings that support sustainable development principles. The Minister noted that environment and biodiversity are important issues on the political agenda and that trade in wildlife is important economically. The ministerial meeting on 13 June 2007 would increase political support for wildlife trade issues through leadership, forging alliances between governments, private sector and civil society, and by matching words to action.

The Deputy Mayor of The Hague, Mr Rabin Baldewsingh, gave a short history of the city, describing its evolution into the International City of Peace, Justice and Security. He highlighted the first International Peace Conference that was held in The Hague in 1899 and the establishment of the International Court of Justice in 1946, as well as more recent developments such as creation of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in 1997 and the International Criminal Court in 2002. He drew attention to the excellent hospitality and services available in The Hague, and exhorted delegates to enjoy its rich cultural offerings. He emphasized the importance of CITES for the future.

The Deputy Executive Director of UNEP, Mr Shafqat Kakakhel, speaking on behalf of the Executive Director, expressed gratitude to the Government of the Netherlands and the city of The Hague for hosting CoP14. He noted that, while the 34-year history of CITES was marked by a great deal of success in combating illegal trade in wild fauna and flora, many threats remained and new challenges were unfolding. He stressed the major threat posed to biodiversity by climate change, observing that decisions taken by the Conference of the Parties to CITES were important in the light of their impact on species already threatened by climate change. He further emphasized the role of CITES in the fight against poverty and the realization of the Millennium Development Goals, ecosystem management and the achievement of the 2010 Biodiversity Target. He said that CITES represented a critical pillar of the global biodiversity endeavour. He stressed UNEP's commitment to CITES, and acknowledged the support of CITES for the Great Ape Survival Project (GRASP), a joint UNEP and UNESCO project, as well as cooperation in the context of the Green Customs Initiative. He expressed the hope that governments would give CITES the backing and resources it needed to fulfil its Strategic Vision for 2008-2013.

Mr Cristián Maquieira, the Chairman of the CITES Standing Committee, indicated that he was especially pleased to participate in the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP14) in The Hague and noted that while there were numerous other conventions dealing with biodiversity and environmental issues, CITES was the only convention regulating trade in flora and fauna from a conservation standpoint. He remarked that there was room for better coordination between existing international environmental agreements and highlighted the potential role for additional private sector engagement in conservation, poverty alleviation and sustainable development.

The Secretary-General, Mr Willem Wijnstekers, expressed his gratitude to the Government and people of the Netherlands and the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of The Hague for hosting the meeting. He stressed the importance of CITES in contributing to poverty reduction and achieving the first Millennium Development Goal. He stressed that CITES needs to evolve to take livelihood issues into consideration. He encouraged domestic policies that promote the sustainability of wildlife trade, recognizing that removal of trade restrictions can lead to the recovery of species previously threatened by trade, as shown by the exemplary recovery of the vicuña and Nile crocodile populations. He noted that CITES was moving into new areas of trade, such as commercially important marine and timber species, and emphasized the importance of the involvement of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the International Tropical Timber Organization in these discussions. He expressed concern that, while CITES had great potential to contribute to achieving global goals and targets, its budget was currently insufficient to fulfil the objectives of the Strategic Vision for 2008-2013. He highlighted the need for major additional financial commitment from Parties to finance the Convention's ambitious programme of work. With this, he declared the meeting of the Conference of the Parties open.