

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



Fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Doha (Qatar), 13-25 March 2010

Summary record of the first plenary session

13 March 2010: 15h00-16h30

Secretariat: Willem Wijnstekers
UNEP: Achim Steiner
Rapporteurs: J. Caldwell
K. Malsch

Welcoming addresses and opening of the meeting

His Excellency the Minister of Environment, Abdulla bin Mubarak bin About Al-Madadi, welcomed all participants, and expressed his pride that this meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Qatar was the first to be held in the Middle East. He noted that CITES was one of the most successful conservation conventions, especially through its aims of balancing environmental and development issues. He expressed the view that illegal trade was one of the main threats to species and was convinced that CITES was having a significant effect in controlling unsustainable trade. He referred to conservation activities undertaken in Qatar, including the successful recovery of the Arabian oryx, which now numbered 1,300 in the country. He hoped that discussions at the current meeting would lead to permanent protection of natural resources through control of trade.

The Executive Director of UNEP, Mr Achim Steiner, began by stressing that CITES was more relevant than ever before, in view of escalating threats to biodiversity. He expressed gratitude to the Government of Qatar for its welcome, noting its recent landmark hosting of a paperless meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol and the Vienna Convention, hoping this would set standards for the future. He urged the international community to redouble efforts to act intersessionally to bring CITES alive, reflecting on its visionary beginnings and its proud 35-year pioneering tradition linking conservation and sustainable use. He noted that it placed environmental management at the heart of economic policies, for which trade was the driver. However, in this United Nations International Year of Biodiversity, he noted that it should be recognized that the goals set by the international community to reverse the rate of species' decline had not been met. CITES was fundamental to stemming biodiversity loss, but its future should be within the context of an emerging international governance regime embracing synergies with other biodiversity-related agreements and, more widely, with global economic realities. Battles fought issue by issue had not served the Convention well and should give pause for thought. He lamented the erosion of resources available to CITES. The Secretariat was struggling to function, let alone grow. In the light of this, he urged Parties to ask themselves what they wanted CITES to deliver and, realistically, what funds were necessary for this, as the current level of funding was tantamount to a mandate to close it down. Five million US dollars for a Convention covering 34,000 species was insufficient and, moreover, greater flexibility in the use of resources was warranted. He ended by thanking the outgoing Secretary-General for his valuable work and leadership and announced his successor, John Scanlon, UNEP's current Principal Advisor to the Executive Director on Policy and Programme. He assured the delegates that he took CITES very seriously and committed UNEP to supporting its effective implementation.

The CITES Secretary-General, Mr Willem Wijnstekers, expressed his gratitude to the Government and people of Qatar for hosting the meeting. He noted that the Conference of the Parties was a perfect opportunity for raising awareness of CITES issues and thanked the host country for providing the interpretation into Arabic. He also thanked the Government of Qatar and other donor Parties for their contribution to the sponsored delegates project. He noted that CITES was the most successful biodiversity agreement and that it had not lost any importance or influence in its 35 years. Since he had become Secretary General in 2000, the membership had increased from 150 to 175 Parties and was now close to the goal of full global membership. Despite the aim of

reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010 not being achieved, he firmly believed that CITES had actively contributed to this overall goal.

He highlighted the need for greater synergies with other biodiversity-related conventions and, in the light of diminishing resources, stressed the importance of simplifying existing resolutions and decisions. He expressed concern that despite an increase in the number of Parties and higher demands on the Secretariat for additional services, funding from Parties had decreased over the last 10 years. He encouraged increased political will to meet obligations and suggested that decisions on the budget will reflect the Parties' commitment to the implementation of the Convention. He drew attention to the latest Activity Report of the CITES Secretariat which summarized activities for 2008-2009. He disagreed with the view that CITES was not a suitable vehicle for management of commercially-exploited marine species. He was also saddened to see inappropriate and unjustified accusations that the Secretariat had manipulated the outcome of the 14th meeting of the Conference as well as suggestions of bias following the publication of provisional assessment of amendment proposals. He emphasized the need for international cooperation and positive dialogue based on mutual respect throughout the meeting. With this, he declared the meeting open.

Election of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the meeting and of the Chairs of Committees I and II and the Credentials Committee.

The Alternate Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee, Mr Meng Xialin, reported that the Standing Committee had nominated Sheikh Doctor Faleh Bin Nasser Al-Thani (Qatar) as Chair of the meeting, Mr Ghanim Abdullah Mohammed (Qatar) as Alternate Chair of the meeting, and Ms Nancy Cespedes (Chile) and Mr Robert Gabel (United States of America) as Vice-Chairs. These nominations were accepted by acclamation.

The nominations of Mr John Donaldson (South Africa), Mr Wilbur Dovey (New Zealand) and Mr Georges Evrard (Belgium) as Chairs of Committees I and II and the Credentials Committee, respectively, were also accepted.

Sheikh Doctor Faleh Bin Nasser Al-Thani then took the chair and declared the session closed at 16h30.