

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

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Seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties  
Johannesburg (South Africa), 24 September – 5 October 2016

Summary record of the first plenary session

24 September 2016: 10h30 - 12h30

Secretariat: J. Scanlon  
UNEP: E. Solheim  
Rapporteurs: J. Gray  
M. Jenkins

**Welcoming addresses and opening of the meeting**

**Her Excellency the Minister of Environmental Affairs of South Africa, Ms. Bomo Edna Molewa**, welcomed participants to the meeting, observing that it was an important opportunity to implement and strengthen policies to protect species and ecosystems.

**His Excellency the President of South Africa, Mr. Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma**, welcomed all participants to South Africa, drawing attention to the important role that CITES plays in ensuring that international trade in wild species was sustainable. He noted that today was South African Heritage Day, a celebration of diversity, and underlined the leading role that South Africa played in conservation of global biodiversity. He observed that South Africa was committed to conservation and sustainable use of wild resources because the country believed that these were fundamental for social transformation and development. In this regard, game farming, hunting, eco-tourism and bioprospecting all played a major role in enhancing the livelihoods of local communities. At the international level, legal trade required regulation, monitoring, enforcement and international cooperation. Illegal trade was a major problem in that it undermined the potential benefits from legal trade, posed a threat to national security, and affected local communities by destroying resources and entrenching crime. South Africa had redoubled its efforts to control illegal trade by engaging stakeholders at all levels and had achieved a notable reduction in rhino poaching in 2016. He stressed the link between sustainable use and development and noted that good global governance and transparency were critical to success in meeting development objectives. He trusted that the outcomes of the present meeting would be based on science and be in the interests of conservation. He then declared the 17th Conference of the Parties (CoP17) open.

**The Chair of the Standing Committee, Mr. Øystein Størkersen**, believed that CITES had remained viable since its inception because of its ability to address new challenges in a world that had altered dramatically. He credited CITES with having led recent increased collaboration both among organizations primarily concerned with biodiversity conservation and with those from other sectors. He highlighted in particular the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime and National Ivory Action Plans. He reflected on impediments to CITES progress, singling out persistent difficulties with CITES implementation, and noting that approximately half of the Parties had inadequate implementing legislation. He nonetheless envisaged a vibrant future for CITES, praising the skill and industry of the Secretary-General and other Secretariat staff, albeit under growing budgetary and other operational constraints. He likewise commended the diligence of his Standing Committee colleagues, and of the new Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, Mr. Erik Solheim. He thanked Parties and other attendees for their support during his tenure as Chair of the Standing Committee.

**The Executive Director of UNEP, Mr. Erik Solheim**, believed that CITES could not succeed in its aims in isolation, but needed to forge links with other sectors, including energy, agriculture, and the wider economy, noting in particular that illegal wildlife trade represented a major economic loss to many, while benefitting a very few. He applauded local efforts such as the Black Mamba Anti-Poaching Unit in South Africa and drew attention to the need to inform as wide an audience as possible of the importance of controlling illegal trade, in this regard

commending the efforts of Beijing Capital International Airport. By acting with others, CITES could contribute to the struggle to protect the planet for future generations.

**The Secretary-General of CITES, Mr. John Scanlon**, expressed his gratitude to the Government and the people of South Africa for their generosity and hospitality in hosting CoP17. He thanked the outgoing Chair of the Standing Committee for his tireless efforts during his time in post and welcomed five new Parties to CITES. He underscored the challenges faced in tackling illegal wildlife trade, but also drew attention to the heightened political and financial support that efforts to tackle such trade had received in recent years. He noted in particular that, since the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the Global Environment Facility had committed USD 131 million to fighting illegal wildlife trade and poaching. He outlined areas in which CITES had been providing enhanced technical support to Parties and observed that there was growing interest in using CITES to ensure legal, sustainable and traceable trade in commercially valuable timber and marine species. He acknowledged that there were differences of opinion on how best to ensure the survival of wildlife, differences that were likely to be expressed robustly during the meeting. He implored participants to behave in a sporting manner, showing due respect for those who did not fully agree with them, and wished all participants a successful meeting.