

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



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

Strategic matters

EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION: CITES AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
REPORT OF THE YOUTH FORUM ON PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

1. This document has been submitted by South Africa and the United States.*
2. According to the United Nations Population Fund, some 1.8 billion people -- nearly one-quarter of the world's population - is aged 10-24.
3. Public surveys conducted in some countries show that youth in those countries are spending more time online and less time outdoors exploring nature. The future of wildlife depends on engaging, educating, and connecting the next generation of conservation leaders with animals and plants that they are increasingly unlikely to encounter on their own.
4. Some published literature also raises concerns about trends in youths' environmental attitudes, beliefs and behaviour, suggesting a decline in personal responsibility for the environment, with youth tending to assign responsibility for the environment to governments.
5. The United Nations Secretary-General made working with and for young people one of his top priorities in his five-year action agenda released in January 2012. As such, he established an Envoy on Youth and tasked this new office with coordinating the efforts of the United Nations on youth issues and bringing the voices of young people to the United Nations System.
6. The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is the central platform within the United Nations system to foster debate and discussion on issues of economic, social, and environmental relevance. Since 2012, ECOSOC has held an annual Youth Forum to bring youth into discussions about the Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 development agenda. The ECOSOC Youth Forum offers a unique opportunity for youth to voice their opinions, share ideas, and think together about what they can do to achieve sustainable development.
7. The ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP9), held in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, United States, marked the first time that students were able to participate in a CITES CoP. More than 800 students from local area schools debated topics and engaged on the issues, and some even attended the CoP as journalists and observers.
8. Directly prior to the seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP17), thirty-four extraordinary young leaders from around the globe will convene for the Youth Forum on People and Wildlife. Chosen from a pool of nearly 1,000 candidates, these youth delegates represent some of the best and brightest of the next generation of wildlife conservationists. During the forum, delegates will engage in skill-building workshops, and explore conservation and wildlife issues, including the impacts of

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wildlife trade. The forum is both an online community and in-person conference for young leaders to learn, share and connect with people around the world.

9. The International Fund for Animal Welfare devised the idea of the Youth Forum for People and Wildlife and led on executing its vision, while also reaching out to partner organizations and governments to ensure broad support and collaboration. The CITES Secretariat, South Africa, the United States, the Jane Goodall Institute, and the Disney Conservation Fund, among others, strongly supported and contributed to the success of the Youth Forum on People and Wildlife, including by promoting the initiative, providing financial and logistical support, and contributing to its design and implementation.
10. Prior to the CoP, South Africa also initiated a process to establish a Youth and Conservation Programme as a legacy programme associated with the hosting of CoP17. The primary aim of the youth conservation programme is to ensure youth involvement in conservation initiatives, creating a platform for exchange and involvement, as well as formal integration of youth into conservation programmes and the biodiversity economy.
11. While the Secretariat and individual Parties may engage with youth through internship programs, employment opportunities, and other educational offerings, a mechanism to encourage regular and on-going dialogue with youth in CITES fora does not currently exist.

Recommendation

12. The United States and South Africa welcome the Youth Forum on People and Wildlife and the Youth and Conservation Programme initiated by South Africa as an example of a national initiative to ensure integration of youth in all aspects of conservation, including CITES matters. We urge the Conference of the Parties to consider the report of the outcomes of the Youth Forum for People and Wildlife and the Youth and Conservation programme engagements, including any recommendations in the reports.

COMMENTS FROM THE SECRETARIAT

The Secretariat supports the initiative of the Youth Forum on People and Wildlife and has provided its full support to this initiative from the outset. The Secretariat also welcomes the Youth and Conservation Programme initiated by South Africa and encourages other Parties to follow suit. The Secretariat reached out to the Office of the United Nations Secretary General's Envoy on Youth on the celebration of World Wildlife Day 2016. It will work more closely with the special envoy in the future observance of the Day, considering that youth and wildlife is a possible theme (or sub-theme) of a future World Wildlife Day.