

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



Eighteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties  
Colombo (Sri Lanka), 23 May – 3 June 2019

Interpretation and implementation matters

General compliance and enforcement

WORKING CONDITIONS OF WILDLIFE RANGERS AND  
THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF CITES

1. This document has been submitted by Nepal.\*
2. It is often asserted that the obligations Parties incur under CITES relate to the regulation of international trade of specimens of species listed in the Appendices, and that the internal management of Parties' wildlife resources, when these are not in trade, is a matter of national sovereignty. However, while this is accepted as a general principle, it is qualified by provisions in relevant Resolutions that acknowledge that the objectives of the Convention cannot be fully achieved without going further in some instances.
3. Field level enforcement against illegal extraction of CITES-listed species (through poaching, illegal logging, etc.) is commonly regarded as one of those domains where national level sovereignty holds sway. As a general rule this is correct; in most circumstances Governments are normally those best qualified to manage the deployment, working conditions, equipment and working practices of rangers and other frontline personnel.
4. Nevertheless, these personnel are vital to achievement of the objectives of CITES. Illegal extraction of specimens of CITES-listed species that may subsequently enter the international trade chain undermines the basic tenets of the Convention. It violates the principle that trade in all listed species should only take place when the legality of origin of the relevant specimens has been verified. It breaches the prohibition of commercial trade in specimens of Appendix I species taken from the wild. And, in the case of Appendix II species, illegal harvest undermines the prospects for legitimate legal trade based on robust non-detriment findings. At a practical level we all rely on rangers and other frontline personnel to prevent illegal extraction where possible, to apprehend offenders in the field and to confiscate illegally obtained specimens already in their possession. We all acknowledge the difficult and dangerous job that rangers do, as attested by the fact that nearly 1,000 rangers have been killed in the line of duty in the last decade.
5. Paragraph 2 of Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP17) on *Compliance and Enforcement* acknowledges the key role that all wildlife enforcement personnel play, by recommending *inter alia* that Parties:
  - a) support wildlife-law enforcement agencies (sub-paragraph ii)); and
  - b) provide officials who have wildlife-law enforcement responsibilities with equivalent training, status and authority to those of their counterparts in Customs and the police (sub-paragraph iii)).

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\* The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CITES Secretariat (or the United Nations Environment Programme) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The responsibility for the contents of the document rests exclusively with its author.

In the light of these considerations, it is in the interests of all CITES Parties to have due regard to the working conditions of frontline field enforcement personnel, i.e. rangers.

6. In this regard, the Governments of [proponent countries] would draw the attention of all parties to a recent global survey of ranger working conditions undertaken by WWF, in consultation with relevant international organisations, including the International Labour Organisation and the World Ranger Federation. This survey, entitled *Life on the Front Line 2018* [insert hyperlink], is based on the results of 4,686 surveys completed by patrol rangers in 17 countries, with each survey containing 197 unique responses. It offers much information for Parties to consider. The results of the survey will be considered in depth by the World Ranger Congress, which meets in Nepal in November 2019, and any input to those discussions is welcome.
7. Concerning **training**, the survey reports that over one third of rangers (38 per cent) surveyed indicated that the training they first received was inadequate to prepare them for the realities of their job. This suggests the need for an urgent review and modification of ranger curricula, many of which are clearly outdated and inadequate for the challenges faced by today's rangers. Of particular concern is the revelation that only 19 per cent of respondents had received any **first aid** training during the 12-month window prior to responding to the survey. This is a considerable oversight when one considers that more than one in 15 rangers surveyed had broken a bone on the job during that same timeframe, and roughly one in eight sustained another type of serious injury.
8. Most of the rangers (57 per cent) also believe that, when **medical treatment** is needed, it will not be adequate. It is clear that more must be done to hasten the delivery of rangers to qualified medical professionals when the need arises. Infectious diseases are also revealed to be a serious threat to ranger well-being, with 25 per cent contracting malaria within the prior 12 months, and 22 per cent contracting another disease or infection that required treatment. The fact that a majority of rangers indicated that their **shelter** is inadequate may partially explain this. Low-cost improvements such as ensuring the availability of **mosquito nets** and **clean drinking water** at outposts would almost certainly go a long way towards reducing these figures. Only 33 per cent and 51 per cent respectively of those surveyed 'often' or 'always' had access to those items.
9. Inadequacy or non-availability of key **equipment** is another issue that puts **rangers at risk**. **Slightly over half of respondents believed that even their most basic equipment (uniform and boots)** is insufficient for the job they do, and many have been forced to replace these items at their own personal expense, often in a context where basic salaries are already low. Furthermore, the fact that 36 per cent of rangers surveyed stated that they never have access to **communication devices during patrol should be a matter of widespread concern**. **The inability to communicate information in real time** makes an already dangerous job far riskier, as well as resulting in preventable illegal acts by poachers and others.
10. Another safety-related matter is the high rate of on-the-job verbal **abuse** (31 per cent) and **threats** (32 per cent) received from community members within the prior 12 months. While the extent of this problem varied between regions, and even between countries within the same region. Improving training (sensitization, human rights considerations, etc.) as it pertains to dealing with local communities and other stakeholders, and opening up a constructive dialogue between wildlife authorities *and* those communities must be made a matter of priority in areas where the situation is problematic. Such an approach could do much to protect the safety of both rangers and local peoples.
11. The solutions to these problems are, for the most part, self-evident. However, implementing them will require political will and action, as well as the support of those organizations that have a stake in rangers or conservation more generally. At minimum, the information revealed through the surveys should help those overseeing budgets for this sector to better prioritize spending and make sound decisions regarding the allocation of finite resources.
12. To accomplish more lasting change however, rangers need to be fully professionalized – which is to say properly valued and supported for the critical role they play, and thus trained and equipped accordingly. Findings in this study, such as the fact that one-third of surveyed rangers have been paid late at least once during the previous year, reveal that there is considerable progress needed on this point.
13. In recent years, with the growing global concern relating to illegal wildlife trade, CITES meetings have rightly devoted considerable time towards such issues as:
  - a) Scaling up efforts to combat such crime, including through the deployment of appropriate technologies;

- b) Positive recognition of the role that can be played by local communities that live in proximity to wildlife; and
- c) Efforts to address the implications of CITES decisions for livelihoods.

It is submitted, however, that all these efforts are at grave risk of failure unless consideration is given to the improvement of basic ranger safety and welfare, professionalization of rangers, and measures to improve the relationships between rangers and local communities. The purpose of this document is not to question the primary role of sovereign Governments in these matters but, rather, to encourage Parties, international organisations, donors and civil society to reflect on these issues.

- 14. The Conference of the Parties is invited to **note** this document and to consider ways in which it can contribute to the discussions at the World Ranger Congress, and to addressing the underlying problems raised above.

#### COMMENTS OF THE SECRETARIAT

- A. The Secretariat recommends that the Conference of Parties note the document submitted by Nepal on *Working conditions of wildlife rangers and their implications for implementation of CITES*.
- B. The CITES Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) Programme developed a site level Law Enforcement Capacity Assessment designed to assess the effort and resources employed by participating range States in the detection and prevention of illegal killing of elephants. Results from this work are broadly in line with the findings of the WWF survey referenced by Nepal, for example with regard to key issues such as training and communications equipment.
- C. The significant scale of the challenge faced by rangers in some countries regarding remuneration and resource constraints are also evident from the threat assessment report on illegal wildlife trade in West and Central Africa, available as an Annex to document CoP18 Doc. 34. This report shows that resources in some countries are not proportionate to the task, with negative consequences for the people involved, conservation efforts, and addressing wildlife crime. Such working conditions sometimes result in criminals involved in wildlife crime operating with a high degree of impunity, and often makes officers vulnerable to corruption.
- D. The Secretariat take this opportunity to draw attention to the work currently being implemented by the MIKE Programme, with funding from the European Union, to improve working conditions for wildlife law enforcement patrol staff in a number of sites in Africa. This work has included the provision of basic field equipment, improvements to water and power supplies, basic and advanced training in field craft, and the enhancement of communications equipment and infrastructure (see document CoP18 Doc. 69.2).
- E. As indicated by Nepal, some provisions to address the areas of concern relating to the working conditions of rangers have been included in Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP17) on *Compliance and enforcement* and Parties are encouraged to make every effort to implement these provisions.
- F. The Secretariat would like to highlight the following provisions adopted by the Conference of Parties in Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP17) on *Compliance and enforcement* in this regard:
  - i) In paragraph 2 a) iii), the Conference of the Parties '*RECOMMENDS that all Parties provide officials who have wildlife-law enforcement responsibilities with equivalent training, status and authority to those of their counterparts in Customs and police*';
  - ii). in paragraph 9 n), it '*RECOMMENDS that Parties put in place, or further enhance, national measures and communication channels to ensure that the required level of real-time support can be provided to park rangers, and other wildlife and enforcement personnel who are confronted by heavily armed groups and exposed to serious risk of attack*';
  - iii) in paragraph 13 k), it '*RECOMMENDS further that the Parties promote incentives to secure the support and cooperation of local and rural communities in managing wildlife resources and thereby combating illegal trade*'; and

iv) in paragraph 16, the Conference of the Parties '*URGES the Parties, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to provide, as a matter of urgency, funds and expertise to enable enforcement-related training or the provision of training materials, focusing, preferably on a regional or subregional basis, on developing countries and countries with economies in transition and range States affected by illegal wildlife trade, and provide funds to ensure that wildlife-law enforcement personnel in such countries are adequately trained and equipped*'.

G. With regards to awareness raising, the Secretariat will continue to do so by celebrating World Ranger Day on 31 July each year and events such as the World Ranger Congress that will take place in November 2019 in Sauraha, Nepal.

TENTATIVE BUDGET AND SOURCE OF FUNDING  
FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DRAFT RESOLUTIONS OR DECISIONS

According to Resolution Conf. 4.6 (Rev. CoP16) on *Submission of draft resolutions, draft decisions and other documents for meetings of the Conference of the Parties*, the Conference of the Parties decided that any draft resolutions or decisions submitted for consideration at a meeting of the Conference of the Parties that have budgetary and workload implications for the Secretariat or permanent committees must contain or be accompanied by a budget for the work involved and an indication of the source of funding.