

Matters Related to the Standing Committee

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN

1. Introduction

Since the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, in Kyoto, Japan, the Standing Committee has met in Lausanne (June 1992), Washington D.C. (March 1993), Brussels (September 1993) and Geneva (March 1994). Given the work programme set for the Standing Committee to manage in this time, especially the review of the criteria for the amendment of the appendices to the Convention, the meetings have been well-attended by an increasing number of participants, largely observers from the Parties. Throughout the period NGO interest in the work of the Convention remained intense. The size of the meetings and the level of NGO interest gave rise to a number of considerations, which are discussed below.

I believe that the Standing Committee can take some considerable pride in having managed the processes needed to carry out the reviews required by the Conference of the Parties. We can be satisfied that the review of criteria in particular has led to a draft resolution worthy of debate by this ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. While we as individual Parties to the Convention might well take issue with aspects of the draft resolution that is the product of our work, we advance the draft in the knowledge that the Parties to the Convention were given ample opportunity to take part in its development, and that the Animals, Plants and Standing Committees were fully and thoroughly involved in its formulation.

It should be acknowledged that a major portion of the workload inevitably fell upon the Secretariat. On behalf of the Standing Committee, I would express gratitude and thanks for the work, support and assistance at all times provided by the very committed staff of the Secretariat. The Secretary General has been punctilious throughout in ensuring that the Secretariat gave proper and fulsome support in servicing the needs of the Parties as represented by the Standing Committee, and has been generous in his time and assistance to the Chairman and members of the Standing Committee. I have had opportunity to see at first hand how well the Secretariat serves the interests of the Convention and the Parties.

2. Major Issues

A number of major issues were directed for the attention of the Standing Committee by the Conference of the Parties at its last meeting and these formed the bulk of the workload of the Committee. In addition, a number of issues emerged during the course of the past two years, which added further to the Committee's load. All of these matters are the subject of reports or draft resolutions for this ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, so the following are brief comments only.

2.1 Review of Criteria

As might have been expected, this exercise proved difficult and contentious. The Conference of the Parties at its eighth meeting directed that IUCN be involved in the initial stages of the review, and they were contracted to do so by the Secretariat. Their competent, professional approach should be acknowledged here, as well as the considerable contribution made beyond the terms of the contract, especially in advising the Standing Committee and in providing verification of the application of new criteria to the existing listings. IUCN were, in the process,

subject to heavy criticism from various quarters based on varying perceptions of the implications of their draft criteria. Their endurance of this criticism needs recognition, given that their specialists acted in good faith in the interests of the Convention.

The review exercise gave rise to a rare, probably even unprecedented event in the history of the Convention, a joint meeting of the Plants, Animals and Standing Committees, in Brussels in September 1993. I would acknowledge the co-operation and effectiveness of the Chairs and members of the Plants and Animals Committees in this meeting and in the entire review exercise, as well as the deep involvement of these Committees along with the Standing Committee in the review process.

The review itself could not have been carried out without the substantial financial support received from a number of Parties, including Japan and the United States of America. The European Commission hosted the Joint Committee Meeting in Brussels and deserves the gratitude of the Parties, as do all the financial donors.

2.2 Revision of the Resolutions of the Conferences of the Parties

The Standing Committee had a choice, at the outset, of pursuing a comprehensive rewriting of the Resolutions of the last eight meetings of the Conferences of the Parties, or taking a more cautious approach involving the grouping of Resolutions on like subjects, revising them to remove redundant material and representing them in consolidated form. The Standing Committee was mindful of the work that goes into each Resolution at each meeting, and that specific wording is the result of hard debate and sometimes compromise. It, therefore, considered that the Parties would want to see a clear trail from the old wording into the consolidated form.

The burden of work in this exercise fell virtually entirely on the Secretariat staff, and recognition is deserved for the meticulous way in which it was carried out by them.

2.3 Illegal Trade in Rhinoceros Horn and Tiger Parts

After the Kyoto meeting the Standing Committee took up the matter of illegal trade in rhinoceros horn as a project deserving special attention. While the focus was initially on problems of law enforcement within range States, it shifted over time more towards consumer States. At an early stage the Committee was made aware of the plight of tiger subspecies in Asia, and that populations were in an even more vulnerable position than those of rhinoceroses. Because tiger parts find their way into the same oriental medicine trade as rhinoceros horn, the two species concerns were merged.

The pressures brought to bear on traditional consumer States in NE Asia by the Standing Committee on behalf of all the Parties, by individual Parties acting unilaterally and by NGOs have been responsible for major shifts at government level in all the consumer countries, changes to domestic legislation to control the holding of stocks of rhinoceros and tiger specimens and to make

domestic and export trade illegal, and for the strengthening of law enforcement capability and effort. The Standing Committee is conscious that rhinoceros and tiger poaching in range States continues and recognizes that much further effort is required to bring illegal trade under control. Further constructive debate on all options and aspects to conserve the rhinoceroses and the tiger is required at this ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

2.4 Finance

The Secretary General and his Secretariat applied tight control to the management of budgets over the period since the last meeting of the Conference of the Parties, resulting in a steadily improving budgetary situation. The Standing Committee draws attention to this improvement and commends the responsible management which has given rise to it.

In addition to the above major issues, the Standing Committee has addressed a number of further recurring themes, most notably the implementation of the Convention in a number of party States (Italy, Thailand, Colombia, Greece, Indonesia and Nepal), the development of a law enforcement network and the authorization of special projects administered by the Secretariat.

3. Management of the Standing Committee

During the last two years, interest in the work of the Standing Committee has grown enormously. Attendance has grown greatly, placing considerable pressure on the Secretariat to service the growth in numbers of observer Parties, and to provide the venue and facilities. In Lausanne, in June 1992, the 28th meeting of the Standing Committee was attended by ten observers. The 31st meeting in Geneva this year was attended by at least 26 observer Parties, some with five or six representatives. In all some 76 participants were registered with the Chairman at the start of the meeting, but an unknown number of additional Party representatives attended for parts of the meeting. This was almost a mini-Conference of the Parties!

Clearly interest in the work of the Standing Committee was stimulated by the major issues of the moment, most notably the review of criteria, the conservation of the rhinoceroses and the tiger, and matters of the implementation of the Convention in individual party States. It remains to be seen whether interest and attendance of these dimensions continues after the ninth meeting, which is dependent to a degree on the tasks assigned to the Standing Committee in Fort Lauderdale. It is my view that the Parties should anticipate an equal workload when focusing on the budgets for the Secretariat and the permanent Committees for the next period. The pace of change in world economies and society and the nature of environmental, conservation and trade issues which arise, frequently require a response from the Convention that can not be left to the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties. While the Secretariat represents the frontline of response it is necessary and appropriate for the Standing Committee to be involved and consulted fully as response is made. As noted above, the Secretary General and his staff have maintained a punctilious observance of roles over the past two years, in communicating with and taking advice and direction from the Chairman and the Standing Committee on behalf of the Parties.

There are a number of further issues, which have come to the fore which need to be brought to the attention of this Conference.

3.1 Resources

The budget approved for the Secretariat at the Kyoto meeting was inadequate in its provision for the servicing of the three official languages of the Convention. The francophone representative of Africa on the Standing Committee was not able to play a full role in the Standing Committee meeting discussions because of an absence of adequate facilities at some meetings for simultaneous translation, and because, at times, he could only be supplied with copies of papers in English. Panama, as alternate representative for South and Central America and the Caribbean, also expressed concern on the matters of interpretation and translation. While the Secretariat did all it could to overcome the difficulty, financial resources proved limiting. I would urge the Budget Committee to ensure that adequate funding is provided to allow all Standing Committee representatives to be equally serviced in these regards.

3.2 NGO Observers

The criteria review work attracted the attention of international NGOs, some of which mounted a vigorous lobby on various aspects of the exercise. Prior to the 29th meeting of the Standing Committee, in March 1993, a number of organizations approached the Chairman seeking to be seated at the meeting as observers, so as to be able to take part in the exercise of reviewing the criteria. Resolution Conf. 6.1 and the established rules of procedure make no provision for observers other than from Parties to the Convention, at Standing Committee meetings. However, an informal meeting between Standing Committee members and NGO members was agreed to, for a fixed time on one evening, after the formal business of the day had been completed. The informal meeting was made voluntary on the part of Standing Committee members and observers, and the time available to address the meeting was equally divided amongst the NGOs represented. This first meeting proved a useful opportunity to present and exchange views on the issues of the time.

While a satisfactory format developed for these meetings, some concerns emerged when the same sort of meeting was repeated on later occasions. In particular some material was presented which proved to be particularly offensive to at least one Party observer. While the present Standing Committee did reaffirm the nature and conduct of these informal meetings, I believe it may be desirable for NGOs themselves to take some initiative to set ethical standards in the management of meetings and to recognize that the privilege of inclusion in the work of the Standing Committee may be placed in jeopardy if offensive material is introduced. I commend this concept to the attention of the next Standing Committee. It may be better to stage SC/NGO meetings at a different venue, and to ensure that members and observers do not have to run a continual gauntlet of lobbying during meetings.

3.3 Workload of the Chairman

The work of the Standing Committee over the recent period has taxed communications facilities to the limits. Work of this nature does require excellent communications to be managed effectively. To illustrate, as Chairman, I have sent approximately 250 fax messages over the past two years, besides receiving and dealing with a like number of letters, faxes and reports from all parts of the world.

The next Standing Committee should take the workload into account in appointing a new

Chairperson and recognize that the provision of communications facilities, secretarial support and financial resources (all of which have been carried over the past two years by the Government of New Zealand) will need to be available, or provided, for the new Chair. I would also say that the sheer size of Standing Committee meetings dictates that the chairing role should, if possible, be independent of representations on behalf of a region. Neutral chairmanship requires that the Party which represents the region providing the Chair should also be in a position to send an additional person to express the views of the region independently of the Chairperson. The Chair should also be fluent in whichever of the official languages is dominant in the representation comprising the Committee.

4. Acknowledgements

The Standing Committee appreciated the opportunity to take part in the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Convention, through the hosting of the 29th meeting of the Standing Committee in Washington D.C., in March 1993. It was a privilege to be able to salute the pioneers of the Convention, as well as to recognize some of the challenges of the next 20 years. On behalf of all the (then) 120 Parties to the Convention I was able to acknowledge the contribution to CITES of: the Depository Government, Switzerland; the United Nations

Environment Programme, based in Nairobi; and the United States Government which hosted the original meeting of the Convention in March 1973, was the venue for the 29th meeting of the Standing Committee, and is now our host for the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Finally, I would acknowledge with sincere thanks the contributions, support and assistance of the Standing Committee members, particularly those who have now served two terms or more and retire from the Committee. Canada now ends a long period of membership of the Committee, and David Brackett has been a tower of wise counsel to us all. Thanks also to Sven Johnansson, representing Sweden, and to Carol James, from Trinidad and Tobago, until recently the Vice-Chair of the Committee. Japan too, as Last Host Country, retires from the Committee, and I would also acknowledge their continued technical and financial assistance to the Convention. To those of you who remain on the Committee, the representatives of Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Senegal, the United States of America and Switzerland, I would say thank you and wish you, and those shortly to join you, well for the next period of management of the interests of the Parties between meetings.

Murray Hosking
Chairman