

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



Sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Bangkok (Thailand), 3-14 March 2013

Summary record of the first plenary session

3 March 2013: 11h00-12h20

Secretariat: J. Scanlon
UNEP: A. Steiner
Rapporteurs: M. Jenkins
R. Parry-Jones

Welcoming addresses and opening of the meeting

A statement by His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge Prince William was relayed by video to the meeting emphasizing the importance of CITES in the conservation and sustainable use of wild species and in the suppression of illegal wildlife trade, which was becoming a major threat to some species. His Royal Highness was confident that participants at the meeting would enter into it in a spirit of cooperation, ensuring a successful outcome. Following this, the Chairman of the CITES Standing Committee, Mr Øystein Størkersen, welcomed all participants on the 40th birthday of the Convention, noting that Thailand was an active member of CITES and applauding the suggestion that 3 March be declared World Wildlife Day. He stressed the role of sustainable use in supporting local communities and noted that the Rio+20 Conference had recognized the importance of CITES. The Convention had developed productive synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and with the private sector, and could count numerous successes in controlling wildlife trade. However, there were many challenges ahead, particularly with regard to the ability of Parties to implement the Convention effectively, and it was timely that discussions were to be held regarding the use of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as a financing mechanism for Parties. He thanked the members of the Standing Committee, the various working groups and the Secretariat for their hard work and dedication and implored the Parties to maintain funding at the existing level.

The Executive Director of UNEP, Mr Achim Steiner, drew attention to the visionary nature of CITES at its birth 40 years ago, recognizing as it did the relationship between nature, people, economies and trade. He congratulated the CITES community on keeping a focus on distinguishing sustainable from unsustainable use of natural resources. He noted that the status of biodiversity continued to deteriorate rapidly, as shown by IUCN in its Red List of Threatened Species, and stressed the role that illegal and uncontrolled wildlife trade played in this, drawing attention to the escalating wildlife poaching crisis in Africa, and the international trade in timber, a large proportion of which was believed to be illegal. Such trade was a route to global poverty, not prosperity, and Mr Steiner outlined the cooperative steps required to address this. He believed CITES was well placed to contribute to the development of a global green economy. In this regard it was noteworthy that the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, agreed under the Convention on Biological Diversity, had been incorporated into the CITES strategic plan. UNEP was committed to supporting CITES through, for example, the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre databases and the work of GRID Arendal.

The CITES Secretary-General, Mr John Scanlon, thanked Thailand for its hospitality in hosting the meeting and reported that the Convention had three new Parties: the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Republic of Maldives and, most recently, the Lebanese Republic, all of which would be represented at the meeting. He also noted that world leaders at Rio+20 had recognized the unique position of CITES at the intersection of international trade, the environment and development. He reported that a record number of participants had registered at the meeting, including representatives of over 150 Parties, indicating renewed interest in the Convention, fuelled in part by an upsurge in wildlife poaching, particularly of elephants and rhinos. Collective action was needed to tackle this crisis and the unsustainable use of wild species more generally. In this regard, the Convention had

made strides in improving collaboration with other international actors, including the International Tropical Timber Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. He drew attention to the need for high-level political and financial commitment if the Convention were to be implemented effectively, and welcomed the presence of the GEF at the meeting.

Her Excellency the Prime Minister of Thailand

Her Excellency the Prime Minister of Thailand, Ms Yingluck Shinawatra, welcomed the delegates to Bangkok noting that this was the second time the Parties had accepted Thailand's offer to host a meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES. She believed this reflected the confidence placed by the Parties in Thailand's commitment to wildlife conservation. Thailand's improved enforcement efforts were testimony to the country meeting its obligations on the global conservation agenda and in protecting species. Thailand's strategy for 2005 to 2014 set clear targets, including the protection and restoration of habitats and ecosystems, as well as the protection of endangered species. The country was firmly committed to sustainable development and green growth. With regard to the suppression of illegal wildlife trade, Thailand had played an important part in the implementation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN WEN). Her Excellency also strongly emphasized Thailand's long-standing affection for elephants, noting their historical and contemporary roles in Thai society, and outlined the country's strategy for ending the illegal trade in ivory. She then declared the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES open.