



## **15th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands**

**“Protecting wetlands for our common future”  
Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, 23-31 July 2025**

**COP15 Doc.8.2**

### **Report of the Secretary General on the implementation of the Convention: Work of the Secretariat**

#### **Introduction**

1. The present report covers the Secretariat’s activities from 14 November 2022, following the closing of the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP14), through to 1 April 2025, providing both an overview and key highlights of the work accomplished during this triennium.
2. The Secretary General has reaffirmed her commitment to enhancing the Secretariat’s work to effectively fulfil its mandate as outlined in Article 8 of the Convention, and to carrying out the instructions set by the Conference of the Contracting Parties and the Standing Committee, to better support Contracting Parties in implementing the Convention’s Strategic Plan. This report is structured around the following key areas:
  - Ensuring operational excellence in support of Contracting Parties;
  - Increasing visibility and awareness of the centrality of wetlands in global processes;
  - Collaborating to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other global targets, and to enhance multilateralism; and
  - Mobilizing resources to support the implementation of the Convention.

#### **Ensuring operational excellence in support of Contracting Parties**

3. The delivery of the Secretariat’s core role in supporting Contracting Parties includes the organization of meetings of governing and subsidiary bodies including the COP, the Standing Committee and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP). During this reporting period, the Secretariat has overseen logistical arrangements, prepared meeting documents and facilitated the convening of the 62nd, 63rd and 64th meetings of the Standing Committee.
4. The Secretariat organized SC62, SC63, SC64 and SC65 between 2023 and 2025. There was strong attendance and engagement from Contracting Parties and observers at these meetings.
  - Participation at SC62 in September 2023 included 147 in-person delegates from 45 Contracting Parties and 21 observer organizations, alongside 130 daily online participants.

- Participation at SC63 in June 2024 included 126 delegates from 48 Contracting Parties, 23 observer organizations and 112 daily online participants. Logistical improvements to enhance participation were introduced at both meetings, including a hybrid setup for an observer overflow room, the displaying of the agenda item being discussed on the plenary screen and updated nameplates.
  - SC64 in January 2025 maintained high levels of engagement, drawing 113 delegates from 52 Contracting Parties, nine observer organizations and up to 76 online participants daily. A survey of participants from all three meetings highlighted satisfaction with logistical arrangements and meeting organization, demonstrating the Secretariat's commitment to operational excellence in support of Contracting Parties.
5. Preparations for COP15 in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, from 23 to 31 July 2025 were undertaken during the reporting period. The host country agreement with the Republic of Zimbabwe was signed, the Secretariat undertook three site visits to prepare and assess the readiness of the meeting facilities and logistics, and a communications plan to bring attention to the COP and its importance was initiated.
  6. The Secretariat organized the 25th, 26th and 27th meetings of the STRP between 2023 and 2024.
    - Participation at STRP25 in May 2023 included 49 participants, comprising all 18 Panel members, representatives of six Contracting Parties and 12 STRP observer organizations. Virtual participation was enabled for plenary sessions, with 12 of the participants attending remotely.
    - STRP26, held in February 2024, included 45 in-person participants, comprising Panel members, STRP National Focal Points, observer organizations and International Organization Partners (IOPs), with an additional 52 remote participants joining plenary and breakout sessions.
    - STRP27 in December 2024 focused on finalizing key outputs aligned with the 2023-2025 work plan, reinforcing the Secretariat's commitment to delivering actionable scientific products. The meeting also featured a dedicated day for consultation with the Earth observation community, in line with Decision SC63-30 of the Standing Committee.
  7. During the triennium the Secretariat supported various Working Groups and Subgroups of the Standing Committee, including the Management Working Group, the Strategic Plan Working Group, the Subgroup on Finance, the CEPA Oversight Panel, the Working Group on Institutional Strengthening, and the Youth Working Group (YWG). Additionally, it facilitated the establishment of the Subgroup on COP15 and the Independent Advisory Committee of the Wetland City Accreditation during SC62. The Secretariat also supported virtual meetings for the newly formed Working Group on RIS Updating and the group of Parties focused on strengthening the process for including Sites on the List of Wetlands of International Importance, as directed by Decisions SC63-33 and SC63-34.
  8. Youth engagement is a key priority for the Secretary General, emphasized through ongoing support for the YWG and the implementation of Resolution XIV.12 on *Strengthening Ramsar connections through youth*. On 21 March 2023, the YWG hosted two global workshops titled "Youth shaping wetland conservation", bringing together over 100 participants to discuss youth roles in wetlands conservation.

9. Throughout the past triennium, youth engagement featured prominently in the Secretary General's global missions and events. At SC62, she met the YWG Chair and members to discuss the Group's progress under the Resolution. At the 28th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP28) in the United Arab Emirates, she co-organized a side event with the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), participating in a high-level panel alongside ministers, ambassadors and youth representatives to emphasize youth empowerment in Pacific wetland conservation. She delivered keynote speeches at the IHE Delft Institute in the Netherlands and the Jawaharlal Nehru University in India, stressing the importance of youth in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Additional engagements included meetings with the Africa Youth for Wetlands Coalition at the sixth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) in Kenya, youth activists in Fujiame-higata and Team Spoon in Japan, and World Water Council Youth Delegates at the 10th World Water Forum in Indonesia, where she participated in a youth-led session and a workshop on advancing the YWG work plan.
10. A key initiative leading to COP15 in July 2025 is the YWG-led webinar series, "Paving the Way to Victoria Falls – Inspiring Action for Wetlands COP15". Organized in collaboration with Youth Engaged in Wetlands, SPREP, IUCN, Wetlands International and others, the series explores conservation, restoration, traditional knowledge, youth capacity building, and career opportunities related to nature-based solutions.
11. During this period, the Secretariat conducted four Ramsar Advisory Missions (RAMs) to support Contracting Parties in addressing conservation challenges faced by Wetlands of International Importance ("Ramsar Sites"). These included a joint mission with the World Heritage Centre (UNESCO) to the Fertő/Neusiedlersee Cultural Landscape (Austria and Hungary), a mission to the Sierra Leone River Estuary (Sierra Leone), a mission to Lago Poopó y Uru Uru (Bolivia) to explore measures for preserving its ecological character, and a mission to Basse Vallée du Couffo, Lagune Côtière Chenal Aho, Lac Ahémé (Benin) to assess threats from development projects and human activities causing annual fish mortality. These RAMs helped the countries to identify solutions to a range of threats affecting the ecological character of these Sites, including urbanization and other human-caused impacts such as wind farms, tourism development and water supply.
12. The Secretary General has emphasized strengthening collaboration with Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) through improved communication and joint planning. A key step was organizing annual planning meetings from 2023 to foster cooperation. These gatherings have led to coordinated plans for COP15, including a shared side event and exhibition stand involving all RRIs.
13. The Secretariat has continued supporting RRIs by facilitating knowledge sharing and resource mobilization. Notably, it connected the French Biodiversity Agency (OFB) with NigerWet and the Southern African Ramsar Regional Initiative (SARRI), resulting in OFB's commitment to support SARRI's organizational development and strategic planning. The Secretary General also promoted RRI activities during international missions. On 14 May 2024, in the Republic of Korea, she celebrated World Wetlands Day by attending a baseball game organized by the Ramsar Regional Center – East Asia and throwing the ceremonial first pitch. Later, on 28 June, she participated in MedWet's celebration of Tour du Valat's 70th anniversary in Arles, France, further reinforcing her support for RRIs worldwide.
14. During the triennium, the Secretariat launched the third call for applications for Wetland City

Accreditation, provided administrative support to the Independent Advisory Committee (IAC) for the 2023-2025 cycle and contributed to several IAC-organized meetings. This process culminated in the accreditation of 31 new Wetland Cities in 16 countries, announced at SC64 in January 2025.

15. The Secretariat continues to enhance IT platforms to improve operational efficiency and support Contracting Parties effectively. The Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS) received a core system upgrade to ensure security and reliability. The Convention website was redeveloped and relaunched in mid-2023, improving accessibility and ease of use. The constituent relationship management (CRM) system remains a key tool for managing contacts, mailings, meeting registrations, nominations and reporting, with ongoing updates to align with security standards. Additionally, the Secretariat is developing a national report data system to facilitate data compilation, visualization and analysis. Streamlined intersessional collaboration is supported through various digital tools, including the CRM, SharePoint, Zoom, Teams, and Adobe online, with a proposed approach for further enhancements presented at SC63.
16. The Secretariat maintained strong financial stability in 2023, 2024 and 2025 through effective financial management and rigorous oversight, in alignment with established financial practices, which have been validated by the external auditors. Significant savings reported at the end of 2024 are resulting from accumulated unspent funds carried forward from the prior triennium. Audited financial statements can be found on the Convention website and are included in the financial reports to the Standing Committee.
17. During the reporting period, the Secretariat successfully recruited five staff members, including a Senior Advisor for the Americas, three Junior Professionals for Asia and Oceania, Europe, and the Americas, and a Wetland Finance Support Officer funded through a cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Korea. A salary review exercise highlighted disparities between the Secretariat and IUCN staff compensation, leading to some salary adjustments within budget constraints. Additionally, a staff retreat using the MBTI methodology was organized in 2024 to strengthen team collaboration and improve work efficiency.

#### **Increasing visibility and awareness of the centrality of wetlands in global processes**

18. Raising visibility and awareness of the vital role of wetlands in global processes is essential for addressing the interconnected crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. Hence, promoting the importance of protecting, conserving and restoring wetlands is crucial to driving the urgent actions required to address all these challenges.
19. During her missions, the Secretary General had the opportunity to meet with several Heads of State. In August 2023, on the margins of the tenth Special Session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) in Ethiopia, she held a courtesy meeting with the then President of Ethiopia, H.E. Sahle-Work Zewde. The discussion focused on the importance of wetlands in Ethiopia, despite the country not yet being a Contracting Party to the Convention. At UNEA-6, a courtesy meeting was also arranged with the President of Gabon, H.E. Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema. As Gabon serves as Vice Chair of the Standing Committee, the meeting provided an opportunity to strengthen collaboration and reaffirm high-level engagement.
20. At the 10th World Water Forum held in Indonesia in May 2024, the Secretary General was invited by the President of Indonesia, H.E. Joko Widodo, to join a high-level delegation visiting the country's largest mangrove nursery on the island of Bali. In June 2024, on the margins of the

Dushanbe Water Conference in Tajikistan, she also held a meeting with H.E. Kanat Bozumbayev, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

21. To strengthen the connection between the Ministries in which the Administrative Authorities and National Focal Points for the Convention are located and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs that drive diplomacy, the Secretariat has since 2023 been sharing information with Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives based in Switzerland. Over the past 18 months, 24 Ambassadors have visited the Secretariat headquarters in Gland, and three major briefings have been held at the UN Offices in Geneva, targeting Ambassadors and UN Heads of Agencies. These efforts have enhanced synergies between the Ministries and increased the visibility of the Convention.
22. Launched in July 2023, the updated Convention website features enhanced usability, speed and security while maintaining a modern and user-friendly design optimized for various devices. Built with the latest version of the Drupal content management system, it allows for efficient content management and long-term maintenance. The Secretariat has expanded the news section with dedicated feature articles on wetland-related themes, publishing weekly updates to provide in-depth insights. The website has received consistently positive feedback from Contracting Parties.
23. Throughout the reporting period, the Convention has maintained an engaged presence across social media, with a following of 34,980 on X, 12,894 on Instagram, 156,000 on Facebook and 18,720 on LinkedIn. Additionally, it has recently expanded to Bluesky, gaining 1,800 followers, while its YouTube channel has 4,400 subscribers. Notably, the Secretary General is particularly active on X, LinkedIn and Facebook, where she engages with 12,486 followers, regularly sharing updates on meetings and insights on wetlands in the global agenda. The Convention posts content daily with the aim of enhancing wetland conservation, which is regularly shared by other Conventions, UN Agencies and NGOs.
24. World Wetlands Day (WWD) celebrations continue to focus attention on important wetland issues. Themes during the reporting period included “It’s time for wetlands restoration” (2023), “Wetlands and human wellbeing” (2024) and “Protecting wetlands for our common future” (2025). Across the reporting period, the numbers of events registered on the map of events were:
  - 2025: 1,975 events in 80 countries;
  - 2024: 1,570 events in 81 countries;
  - 2023: 1,817 events in 78 countries.
25. From 2023 to 2025, the WWD campaign was strategically executed across social media platforms, achieving remarkable success. In 2023, it reached an impressive 3.13 billion potential users, in 2024 it reached 2.5 billion potential users and in 2025, this number surged to 6.72 billion, significantly expanding awareness and engagement with the campaign. Additionally, on 2 February 2025, World Wetlands Day trended across platforms such as X and Instagram, generating visibility.
26. The Secretariat continues to effectively utilize annual international days to highlight the critical importance of wetlands for both the planet and its people. On international days such as International Women’s Day (8 March), World Water Day (22 March), International Day for Biological Diversity (22 May), World Environment Day (5 June), World Ocean Day (8 June) and World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought (17 June), the Secretariat shared video and text statements from the Secretary General and developed event-specific social media content.

Additionally, the Secretary General was invited to various sessions, at which she had the honour of opening the celebrations as a guest speaker. Notably, the Secretary General actively seeks opportunities to engage with international media to raise awareness of wetlands.

27. In 2024, nominations were sought for the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards, which will be presented at COP15 to recognize and honour the achievements of individuals for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. The Danone Group has provided an Evian Special Prize of USD 10,000 for each of the three award categories:
  - **Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award for Innovation – Laura Gonzalez (Panama)**, Executive Director of Marea Verde, for pioneering the Wanda System, a river-based waste capture system that has prevented over 240,000 kilogrammes of plastic pollution from reaching Panama Bay.
  - **Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award for Young Wetland Champions – Iman Ebrahimi (Iran (Islamic Republic of))**, Founder of Avaye Boom Bird Conservation Society, for his leadership in engaging communities and conserving key wetland sites, including Arjan, Shidvar and Gavkhouni.
  - **Ramsar Wetland Indigenous Peoples Conservation and Wise Use Award – Dayana Blanco Quiroga (Bolivia (Plurinational State of))**, for her outstanding work in restoring Lake Uru Uru using Indigenous knowledge and nature-based solutions, while empowering local women and youth.
28. The Secretariat actively engages in the online meetings of the “Communications Flotilla” organized by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). This initiative aims to coordinate communications and create synergies among various biodiversity-related Conventions and organizations. The group is instrumental in supporting and advancing the WWD and COP15 outreach efforts. Furthermore, the Secretariat has established a communications engagement group in collaboration with the IOPs.
29. Through the implementation of its communications strategy, the Secretariat produces informative, current and relevant content that partners and stakeholders can effectively disseminate. Central to this approach is the creation of compelling narratives, such as showcasing “wetland champions” to foster understanding and inspire action for wetland conservation.
30. Furthering this commitment, the Secretariat is actively sharing stories through the “Women Changemakers in the World of Wetlands” campaign, which celebrates the important roles women play in wetland conservation. Launched on International Women’s Day 2024, the inaugural cohort featured 12 remarkable women whose efforts have significantly contributed to the preservation and sustainable use of wetlands. In 2025, the campaign continued to honour outstanding women leaders. This initiative underscores the Secretariat’s commitment to highlighting the essential contributions of women in safeguarding wetland ecosystems.

#### **Collaboration to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and other global targets, and to enhance multilateralism**

31. Contracting Parties have expressed their desire for the Secretariat, on behalf of the Convention, to be active in the wider global policy agenda. This aligns with the implementation of Resolution XIV.6, which focuses on enhancing the Convention’s visibility and strengthening synergies with

other multilateral environmental agreements and international institutions. To this aim, the Secretariat continues to prioritize its work in supporting international cooperation and raising the profile of wetlands and the Convention in the global policy agenda. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework are driving national and international planning and funding efforts. The increased attention ensures that wetlands and the work of Contracting Parties under the Convention contribute to these policy frameworks.

32. The Secretariat continues to strengthen its engagement in the global policy agenda, advocating for the critical role of wetlands in addressing climate change, biodiversity loss and water security. The Secretary General led delegations to major international events, including UNEA-6, UNFCCC COP28, the 10th World Water Forum and the tenth Special Session of AMCEN. At these events, she highlighted the Convention's contributions to sustainable development and urged greater integration of wetlands into global environmental policies.
33. In May 2024, the Secretary General undertook a high-level mission to East Asia, engaging with key stakeholders in Japan, Indonesia and the Republic of Korea, to strengthen regional collaboration on wetland conservation. In June 2024, she visited the European Union headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, to advocate for stronger partnerships between the Convention on Wetlands and EU institutions. The Secretariat also continues to deepen its relationship with the Geneva-based Permanent Missions to the United Nations and its agencies through briefings and bilateral meetings, ensuring wetlands remain a priority on the global agenda.
34. The Secretariat actively collaborates with multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), and the World Heritage Convention (WHC). It also contributes to the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and works closely with UN Water on SDG 6, which focuses on ensuring access to water and sanitation for all. These efforts reinforce the Secretariat's role in advancing international cooperation and positioning wetlands as a key solution to global environmental challenges.

### **Mobilizing resources to support implementation of the Convention**

35. Availability of sufficient and predictable funding is essential for effective implementation of the Convention. The Secretariat has taken action to encourage timely payment of contributions to the core budget by Contracting Parties and to raise funds for the non-core fundraising priorities identified in Annex 4 of Resolution XIV.1 on *Financial and budgetary matters*.
36. The resource mobilization work plan<sup>1</sup>, approved by the Standing Committee at SC62 in September 2023, outlines the Secretariat's strategy for securing funding for non-core priorities for this triennium. The Secretariat is grateful for the voluntary contributions received during this reporting period, from the governments of Austria, Canada, China, Finland, Germany, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, Zimbabwe, Danone and the Nagao Natural Environment Foundation.

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<sup>1</sup>See <https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc62-doc18-resource-mobilization-work-plan-2023-2025>.

37. In response to a request from the government of Morocco, the Secretariat undertook fundraising efforts to support travel of delegates to Marrakesh, Morocco, to participate in the pre-SC64 African regional meeting. Contributions for delegate travel were received from the government of Switzerland and the government of France through the French Biodiversity Agency (OFB) as well as NatureXpairs, along with in-kind support from the government of Morocco.
38. Looking ahead to COP15 in Zimbabwe, the Secretariat is actively seeking CHF 584,040 in voluntary contributions to cover flights, accommodation and daily subsistence allowances for 124 delegates from developing countries, economies in transition, and Small Island Developing States. There is no core-budget funding for delegates to participate in the meeting, making voluntary contributions essential for ensuring full participation. This is important to enable consensus-based decisions and necessary as at least one-third of the Contracting Parties must be present to hold the meeting, and two-thirds to make decisions. The Secretariat extends its gratitude to the governments of Australia, Austria, Canada, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for their voluntary contributions and encourages more Contracting Parties to support this critical fundraising initiative.
39. Currently, the funding for non-core priorities relies on a limited pool of consistent donors, with over 70% from government sources. The Secretariat has observed that administrative priorities, such as facilitating delegate travel, tend to attract low donor interest compared to areas such as capacity building and awareness raising or the activities of the STRP. In response to these challenges, the Secretariat is exploring approaches aimed at diversifying the donor base and increasing funding for non-core priorities.
40. In conclusion, the Secretariat has made notable progress between 14 November 2022 and 1 April 2025 in supporting Contracting Parties, improving operational efficiency and strengthening global awareness of wetlands. Through enhanced collaboration, resource mobilization and strategic initiatives, it continues to advance the Convention's objectives while aligning with the SDGs and other international commitments. Committed to its mandate, the Secretariat remains dedicated to fostering multilateral cooperation and ensuring the conservation and sustainable management of wetlands.