

## Preparation of a Language Strategy for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

### Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. take note of this document and in particular the language-related needs expressed by the Contracting Parties; and
- ii. to provide its comments on the questions raised for clarification in Annex 1, and in particular paragraphs 47, 51, 52, 54, 55 and 57, so that a draft language strategy can be presented at the 54<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee.

1. At the 12th meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Ramsar Convention, Resolution XII.3 was adopted, requesting the Secretariat to develop a strategy, subject to the availability of resources, outlining the potential phased integration of Arabic or other languages of the United Nations (UN) into the work of the Convention. The Resolution requests that the Standing Committee monitor the progress of this work and provide advice and that the Standing Committee:

*... submit a report and its recommendations to the 13<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, containing the strategy with a view to address accommodation of the Arabic language into the Convention supported by a financial mechanism and options for a step-by-step introduction of Arabic into the work of the Convention subject to the availability of resources. (para. 29 of the Resolution)*

2. At its 52nd meeting (SC52), the Ramsar Standing Committee adopted Decision SC52-21, in which “The Standing Committee requested the Ramsar Secretariat to develop a strategy, without consultant support, outlining the potential phased integration of Arabic or other UN languages into the work of the Convention contained in the annex to Doc. SC52.03 Rev. 1.”
3. The work to be undertaken in the strategy included:
  - a. *To classify the language needs of the Convention according to the short, medium and long-term work of the Convention;*
  - b. *To identify barriers to effective translation, publishing and interpreting of the three official languages of the Convention, and actions needed to overcome them including identification of additional resource needs and sources to accommodate inclusion of additional languages;*
  - c. *To propose ways forward to engage relevant Contracting Parties in finding a step-by-step integration and financing of translations at meetings, of meeting documents and as*

*appropriate of important Ramsar information documents into additional UN languages, and to analyse the sustainability of including those languages into the work of the Convention;*

- d. To propose a potential timeline for phased integration of procedural changes, key indicators, and milestones for any UN languages added; and*
  - e. To present details of the present cost of translation and interpretation into English, French and Spanish, and the proportional amount used from each Contracting Party's annual contribution to cover such costs.*
4. At SC52, the Standing Committee established an open-ended informal working group representing a range of language groups and comprising at least Colombia, Romania, Senegal, United Arab Emirates and United States of America, to provide advice to the Secretariat in developing the strategy. The Secretariat provided a draft document to the working group members on 14 February 2017. After receiving requests for additional time the Secretariat received comments from Colombia and the United States of America. A conference call was organized by the Secretariat to discuss the comments, with participation from these two Parties and with the United Arab Emirates, which submitted its comments subsequently.
  5. Taking account of the comments received, the Secretariat has prepared the present document to provide, in Annex 1, the background for the preparation of a draft strategy on language services. As foreseen in Resolution XII.3, the Secretariat is seeking advice and clarification from the Standing Committee in developing the draft strategy.
  6. The Standing Committee is invited to consider the information presented in Annex 1, and to provide its views on the further development of the draft language strategy, and in particular to provide guidance in response to paragraphs 47, 51, 52, 54, 55 and 57.
  7. The Secretariat would appreciate the Committee's guidance so that a final draft can be prepared for consideration at SC54, for forwarding to the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

## Annex 1 Preparation of a Language Strategy for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

### BACKGROUND

1. The Rules of Procedure of the Conference of the Parties state, in Rule 48, that "The official and working languages of the Conference of the Parties shall be English, French and Spanish". When an intervention is made, or an official document is produced in an official language, Rules 49 and 50, respectively, provide for their interpretation or translation into the other official languages. There is no agreed definition of "official" and "working" in this context.
2. In accordance with Rule 25.5, these rules apply *mutatis mutandis* to the meetings of subsidiary bodies, with a few exceptions, notably that:  
*Interpretation into the official Convention languages shall be provided in sessions of the Standing Committee. The Secretariat shall endeavour to provide interpretation in other Committee or Working Group sessions, including meetings of the Conference Bureau, subject to available resources.*
3. The language services currently provided using the core budget and other available resources are summarized in Table 1.
4. However, in the early years of the Convention, English and, to a lesser extent, French were the main languages used for communications between the Secretariat and the Contracting Parties, and at meetings of the Standing Committee and of the Conference of Contracting Parties.
5. At Ramsar COP4 (Montreux, 1990), Spanish was adopted as "...a working language of the Conference of the Contracting Parties" (Resolution 4.2). At COP5 (Kushiro, 1993), the Rules of Procedure were amended to reflect the status of Spanish as a working language" of the Convention. By COP8 (San Jose, 1999), the Rules of Procedure stated that English, French and Spanish were "official and working languages of the Conference of the Parties" (see document Ramsar COP8 DOC.2).
6. Following COP5, a greater number of the Convention's documents and communication materials were translated into Spanish (e.g. the Ramsar website), sometimes with voluntary financial support from Parties and partners. However, Standing Committee agendas, decisions and reports were translated on an irregular basis into French and Spanish, owing to the lack of financial resources.
7. At the 48th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC48, 2015), the meeting documents were translated into French and Spanish with funds from that year's budget surplus. At COP12 (Punta del Este, 2015), the core budget adopted for the 2016-2018 triennium included the cost of translating all Standing Committee documents into French and Spanish (see Resolution XII.1).
8. In Resolution XII.5, Annex 1, paragraph 40 provides for the operation of meetings of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) in the three official Convention languages and translation of the meeting documents into those languages, subject to the availability of resources. Such resources have not yet been found or made available. As a result, the STRP works in English and, as the composition of the STRP change every triennium, the need for interpretation and translation of documents needs to be reviewed at the start of each cycle, depending upon the requirements of the members.
9. COP5 recommendation 5.15 recommended that the Contracting Parties, the Standing Committee and the Bureau ensure that facilities for interpretation to and from the local vernacular language

be available at future meetings. It also called on the 'Convention Bureau' (now called the 'Secretariat'), "...to investigate the possibility of adopting Arabic as a working language of the Conference and to advise the Standing Committee on the financial and other implications of so doing". The Resolution requested "...Arabic-speaking Contracting Parties and potential Contracting Parties to assist the Bureau in seeking the necessary funding support for the adoption of Arabic as a working language of the Conference."

10. Resolution XI.1 instructs the Standing Committee to form a working group "...to develop strategies that explore the accommodation of UN languages into the Convention". A working group was formed and reported at SC46 (2013) that it supported the addition of Arabic as an official language of the Convention and that there was a need to estimate the costs for doing so, and to obtain sustainable funding for it.

11. At COP12, through Resolution XII.3, the Conference of the Contracting Parties:

*26. REQUESTS the Secretariat to develop a strategy to be presented at SC51 and REQUESTS the Standing Committee to monitor progress and advise as necessary, subject to the availability of resources, outlining the potential phased integration of Arabic or other UN languages into the work of the Convention, which:*

- a) Classifies the language needs of the Convention according to the short-, medium- and long-term work of the Convention;*
- b) Identifies barriers to effective translation, publishing and interpreting of the three official languages of the Convention, and actions needed to overcome them including identification of additional resource needs and sources to accommodate inclusion of additional languages;*
- c) Proposes ways forward to engage relevant Contracting Parties in finding a step by step integration and financing of translations at meetings, of meeting documents and as appropriate of important Ramsar information documents into additional languages;*
- d) Proposes a potential timeline for phased integration of procedural changes, key indicators, and milestones for any UN languages added;*
- e) Prepare a draft text for a Resolution addressing accommodation of the Arabic Language into the Convention, outlining in detail the financial implications, including any implications for the core budget, of further phased integration of existing Convention languages in line with the scale of existing resources, and options for a step-by-step introduction of Arabic into the work of the Convention subject to the availability of resources;*

*27. RECOGNIZES that a phased approach would be needed to integrate any new language into the Convention as an "official" and "working" language, with a related need for identification of sources for gradual increase in extra-budgetary funding, capacity and outputs and address potential resulting impacts on funding for other budgetary items in order to accommodate any new language(s);*

*28. INSTRUCTS the Standing Committee, through the Management Working Group, to monitor the progress made in the drafting of the strategy pertaining to a phased approach to language integration, including efforts to fully integrate Spanish and French into the work of the Convention, in accordance with COP decisions;*

*29. ALSO REQUESTS the Standing Committee to submit a report and its recommendations to the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, containing the strategy with a view to address accommodation of the Arabic language into the Convention supported by a financial mechanism and options for a step-by-step introduction of Arabic into the work of the Convention subject to the availability of resources;*

*30. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to provide translation of the most important Ramsar information documents into their own official languages and to make the translation publicly accessible on the Ramsar website; and*

*31. INSTRUCTS the Secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, with the assistance of Contracting Parties and Regional Centres and guided by the Management Working Group, to build up an online library of official and non-official government translated Ramsar documents to be publicly accessible, and report the status of progress to COP13, and REQUESTS Parties to provide such documents to the Secretariat.*

#### PREPARATION FOR A DRAFT STRATEGY

This discussion follows the structure provided for in Resolution XII.3, paragraph 26,

#### **a) Grouping of language needs of the Convention according to short-, medium- and long-term**

12. The decisions taken by Contracting Parties and summarized above reflect needs expressed by Contracting Parties regarding languages of the Convention. Resolution XII.3 acknowledges that the accommodation of additional languages into the daily work of the Convention could foster the engagement of more Contracting Parties. Specific references are made to: efforts to fully integrate Spanish and French into the work of the Convention, in accordance with COP decisions (Resolution XII.3, para. 28); the request by Arabic-speaking countries to incorporate Arabic as a working and official language (recommendation 5.15 and Resolutions XI.1 and XII.3); and expanding consideration to other UN languages (Resolution XII.3).
13. To better understand the language needs of the Parties, an online survey was conducted between October and November 2016 using a Survey Monkey questionnaire in English, French and Spanish. Unfortunately, there was insufficient funding to translate the questionnaire into the other three languages of the UN: Arabic, Chinese and Russian.
14. Only 37 of the 169 Parties to the Convention responded to the questionnaire. Consequently, the results cannot be taken as fully representing the view of all Parties, but are rather indicative. The main findings are summarized below. (Note: not all Parties responded to each question, so the totals vary.) The full responses may be viewed at the following page on the Ramsar website: [www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/cps\\_language\\_survey\\_responses\\_summary\\_e\\_111016.pdf](http://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/cps_language_survey_responses_summary_e_111016.pdf).
15. Breakdown of responding Parties:
  - Regional breakdown: Africa 11 (31%), Asia 7 (19%), Europe 11 (31%), Latin America and the Caribbean 5 (14%), North America 1 (3%), Oceania 1 (3%);
  - Language of response: English 25 (68%), French 8 (22%), Spanish 4 (10%);
  - National official languages reported by respondents (may be more than one): Arabic 9, English 9, French 6, Spanish 4, Chinese 1, others 12;
  - In 20 (54%) of the 37 responding Parties, languages without national official status are also widely used, including English (9 Parties), French (4), Arabic (2), Spanish (1) and Russian (1).
16. The following paragraphs summarize views expressed in the questionnaire regarding the Parties' short-, medium- and long-term language needs.
17. *Short-term* language needs included:
  - English, French and Spanish should all be at the same level, with translations and communications of high quality;
  - The possibility to translate key documents into other UN languages, particularly Arabic;

- Regarding which items should be a priority for translation, many Parties indicated the following as priorities (in order of number of responses identifying an element as a priority):
  - i. Ramsar website pages;
  - ii. COP Resolutions;
  - iii. RSIS / Ramsar Site information, and
  - iv. Scientific and technical guidance documents;
- Parties to voluntarily translate other important Convention documents into their local languages, as some Parties are already doing;
- Secretariat to support Parties to translate Convention documents and provide the format of awareness material so that they can be adapted into the local language.

18. *Medium-term* language needs included:

- Increasing the language provision in French and that 90% of the information be available and error-free in Spanish, particularly all news and documents on scientific and technical guidance;
- Introduce Arabic as an official language with 50-70% of documents to be in Arabic as well as the Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS) and the website.

19. *Long-term* language needs included:

- Improving the structure of the Ramsar website to facilitate access to all available documents and the Spanish search engine;
- Adopting all UN languages into the work of the Convention, and for all documents and communication at meeting to include these languages;
- Ramsar website to have intelligent electronic translations to allow all users to view documents and web pages automatically in native language. However, this service needs to be better and more professional than Google translate or Tradukka.

20. Parties provided the following additional comments on the language needs of the Convention:

- It would be better if we could have one language only, then more funds would go directly to wetlands instead of using funds for paying translators;
- Three official languages are more than sufficient from both technical and financial points of view;
- Countries requiring the use of additional languages could provide expertise from within their countries that can contribute to the integration, such as providing volunteer language personnel to the Secretariat;
- There is a need to use more automated and high-tech translation systems;
- There is a need to improve the quality and speed of translation of texts in the current three official and working languages.

21. There are some inconsistencies in the results of the survey, reflecting the diversity of views of the Parties on this subject. An analysis of these views suggests the following possible categorization of needs:

Short-term needs:

- English, French and Spanish should be brought to the same level in terms of treatment of all translation of official documents and interpretation during meetings;
- Conference of the Contracting Parties should determine whether Arabic is an official and working language;

Medium-term needs:

- If Arabic is adopted as an official and working language, provide all new official documents in Arabic and interpretation at meetings in Arabic;
- Start to provide all new non-official documents and texts in official languages to the extent that resources allow;

- Conference of the Contracting Parties should determine whether other UN languages are official and working languages;
- Introduce the use of electronic translation tools on the Ramsar website;

Long-term needs:

- If other UN languages are adopted as official and working languages, provide all new official documents and meeting interpretation in those languages;
- Provide key official and reference documents (not only new meeting documents) in all official and working languages as resources allow.

- b) Barriers to the effective provision of the current languages of the Convention, and actions needed to overcome them including identification of additional resource needs and sources to accommodate inclusion of additional languages;**  
**and**  
**e) Present cost of translation and interpretation into English, French and Spanish, and the proportion used from each Contracting Party's annual contribution.**

#### Gaps in language provisions

22. Table 1 summarizes what is currently provided in of the official languages of the Convention. The text in *italics* indicates language services that the Conference of the Contracting Parties has decided should be subject to available resources. The final rows, regarding the website, reflect a service that is part of a modern communication strategy, and falls under the category of Ramsar information documents, referred to in Resolution Conf. XII.3, paragraph 26.c).

Table 1: Summary of current Ramsar provision in English, French and Spanish

Body	Outputs	English	French	Spanish
COP	Documents	✓	✓	✓
	Interpretation in plenary	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Interpretation in breakout and other sessions</i>	✓	X	X
	<i>Interpretation in regional meetings</i>	✓	✓	✓
Standing Committee	Documents	✓	✓	✓
	Interpretation in plenary room	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Interpretation in plenary room for Management Working Group and subgroups</i>	✓	✓	✓
	<i>Interpretation in breakout and other sessions</i>	✓	X	X
STRP (subject to available resources)	<i>Documents</i>	✓	X	X
	<i>Interpretation in plenary</i>	✓	X	X
	<i>Interpretation in breakout and other sessions</i>	✓	X	X
Website	Text	✓	✓	✓
	Most Publications / guidance	✓	✓	✓

23. As the table shows, although French and Spanish are official languages of the Convention, their provision is not yet fully integrated into its work.
24. At SC48 (2015), it was possible to translate the meeting documents into French and Spanish with funds from that year's budget surplus. At COP12 (2015), the Contracting Parties agreed to include in the core budget, within item I. "Standing Committee Services", the cost of translating all Standing Committee documents into French and Spanish for the 2016-2018 triennium (Resolution

XII.1). The continued provision of this translation for the next triennium is subject to agreement of its inclusion in the budget at COP13.

### Barriers

25. The main barrier to the full and effective provision of the current official languages of the Convention, and to the accommodation of additional languages, is the lack of funding.

### Costs

26. Currently, the funds for provision of the language services of the Ramsar Convention come from the core budget provided by the Contracting Parties through their annual contributions. This is how similar environmental conventions, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) fund their language provision (see Annex A).
27. The total cost per triennium to the core budget for language provision in English, French and Spanish is CHF 450,000, representing 2.9% of the core budget of CHF 15,243,000 for the 2016-2018 triennium (Table 2). Until now, the cost of interpretation and translation at meetings of the COP and of translation of draft resolutions prepared in advance has been covered by the host country, or by a donor Party and not by the core budget. The Parties could now consider whether this is appropriate.

Table 2. Current cost of providing for English, French and Spanish

Task	Cost per year (CHF)	Cost per triennium (CHF)
<b>Standing Committee meetings</b>		
Translation of all documents	60,000	180,000
Interpretation for two days of working group and subgroup meetings, and three days of plenary meetings <sup>1</sup>	45,000	135,000
<i>subtotal</i>	<i>105,000</i>	<i>315,000</i>
<b>Other documents and texts</b>		
Publications, web content and communications with Parties	45,000	135,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>150,000</b>	<b>450,000</b>

<sup>1</sup> Assuming three Standing Committee meetings each triennium

28. The additional cost to the core budget of providing interpretation at STRP meetings and translation of meeting documents into French and Spanish is estimated to be CHF 315,000 (Table 3). Such funding, if not provided by donors, would need to be agreed by the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

Table 3. Additional cost to the core budget for full provision of French and Spanish

Task	Cost per year (CHF)	Cost per triennium (CHF)
<b>STRP meetings</b>		
Translation of all documents into French and Spanish	60,000	180,000
Interpretation into French and Spanish for five plenary days	45,000	135,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>105,000</b>	<b>315,000</b>

29. If this additional cost of CHF 315,000 were added to the existing cost of language provision (CHF 450,000), the new cost to the core budget for full provision of all official and working languages would be CHF 765,000. This would represent 5.0% of the core budget for the 2016-2018 triennium.
30. The additional cost of introduction and full integration of each additional UN language to the work of the Convention is estimated to be CHF 530,000 (see Table 4), representing an additional 3.5% of the core budget for the 2016-2018 triennium. There would be a further cost to the Secretariat for hiring staff with skills in the new language if it is expected to communicate with the Parties and to prepare or edit documents or other texts in that language.

Table 4. Estimated cost for full integration of each additional official and working language

Task	Cost per year (CHF)	Cost per triennium (CHF)
<b>Conference of the Contracting Parties<sup>1</sup></b>		
Translation of documents		60,000
Interpretation		50,000
<i>subtotal</i>		<i>110,000</i>
<b>Standing Committee meetings<sup>2</sup></b>		
Translation of documents	30,000	90,000
Interpretation for two days of working group and subgroup meetings, and three days of plenary meetings	22,500	67,500
<i>subtotal</i>	<i>52,500</i>	<i>157,500</i>
<b>STRP meetings<sup>2</sup></b>		
Translation of documents	30,000	90,000
Interpretation for five plenary days	22,500	67,500
<i>subtotal</i>	<i>52,500</i>	<i>157,500</i>
<b>Other documents &amp; texts</b>		
Translation of publications and website content (including translation of new documents and of key previous reference documents)	35,000	105,000
<i>subtotal</i>	<i>35,000</i>	<i>105,000</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>140,000<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>530,000</b>

<sup>1</sup> Assuming the costs are not paid by the Host Country

<sup>2</sup> Assuming three meetings each triennium

<sup>3</sup> Excludes CoP costs, which are not annual

#### Sources of funding

31. For all costs of implementing the Ramsar programme of work, there are two potential sources of funding: the core budget, provided by Contracting Parties; and external funding in the form of donations, provided by governments, organizations or the private sector, in cash or in kind.
32. In the response to the survey of language needs: 24 (69%) of the 35 respondents said that they would not be willing to increase their annual contribution to enable greater implementation of the Convention through further language integration; 10 (29%) said that they may be willing, depending on the amount of the increase; and 1 (3%) said that they would be willing.
33. In response to the question on whether Parties would be willing to provide a voluntary contribution to enable greater implementation of the Convention through further language integration: 19 (65%) out of 29 respondents said that they would not be willing to do so; 9 (31%)

said that they would be willing to do so in their own country; and 1 (3%) said that they would be willing to do so in another country.

34. At COP5 (Kushiro, 1993), in recommendation 5.15, the Conference of the Contracting Parties “request(ed) Arabic-speaking Contracting Parties and potential Contracting Parties to assist the Bureau [now the Secretariat] in seeking the necessary funding support for the adoption of Arabic as a working language of the Conference”. So far this has not been achieved.
35. It is worth noting that no other multilateral environmental agreement relies on external funding for the provision of its official language services for the parties. However, for publications produced through projects, or for meetings that are sponsored, it is not unusual to provide for the translation and interpretation costs in the project document seeking funding.
36. If the Conference of the Contracting Parties agrees to establish one or more additional languages as official and working languages of the Convention, it could ask the finance subgroup to explore potential funding from the core budget, and to advise on possible increases in Parties’ contributions or reallocations within the budget.
37. If the CoP decides that a language service is subject to external funding, the Secretariat will seek the required funds from donors, but there would of course be no guarantee of sustainability in the long term.

#### Experience from other conventions

38. In considering the language needs of the Ramsar Convention and appropriate solutions, Parties may find it useful to refer to the experience and practice of some other conventions. The Secretariat contacted the secretariats of other environmental conventions in 2014, while preparing document SC47-02, *Progress report: Subgroups to progress Resolution XI.1 (Convention languages, visibility and ministerial COP segment, enhancing synergies with multilateral environmental agreements and other international entities)*. Enquiries in the preparation of the present document confirmed that the information is still correct.
39. Document SC47-02 includes the following summary:

*11. Other biodiversity-related conventions, such as CMS and CITES, provide a similar balance of translation into English, French and Spanish to Ramsar (see Table below). Ramsar is perhaps more consistent in making its publications available in French and Spanish. On the other hand, CMS provides Standing Committee and Scientific Council documents in French, while CITES also provides translation and interpreting in French and Spanish at its two main committees, the Animals Committee and the Plants Committee.*

*Table: Comparison of current language provision by Ramsar, CMS and CITES*

<b>Body</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Ramsar</b>	<b>CMS</b>	<b>CITES</b>
<b>COP</b>	<i>Documents</i>	<i>EFS</i>	<i>EFS</i>	<i>EFS</i>
	<i>Interpretation in plenary</i>	<i>EFS</i>	<i>EFS</i>	<i>EFS</i>
	<i>Interpretation in regional meetings</i>	<i>EFS</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>EFS</i>
<b>Standing Committee</b>	<i>Documents</i>	<i>EFS</i>	<i>EFS</i>	<i>EFS</i>
	<i>Interpretation, plenary</i>	<i>EFS</i>	<i>EFS</i>	<i>EFS</i>
	<i>Interpretation in breakout and other sessions</i>	<i>No<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>No</i>	<i>No</i>
<b>STRP</b>	<i>Documents</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>EFS*</i>	<i>EFS*</i>
	<i>Interpretation in plenary</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>EFS*</i>	<i>EFS*</i>

	<i>Interpretation in breakout and other sessions</i>	No	No	No
Website	Text	EFS	E*	EFS
	Publications / guidance	EFS	EFS	EFS

<sup>1</sup> Since 2014, this has changed in relation to working groups

\*different from Ramsar

*12. The practice among other related conventions is as varied as their subject matter. CBD provides web content in all six UN languages, and summary reports of SBSTTA. The International Treaty for Plant Genetic Resources provides documents for all their meetings in the six UN languages and web content in English, French and Spanish. The World Heritage Centre operates in English and French only with UNESCO support (except, for example, for summary World Heritage Site notes which are typically published in the six UN languages, Dutch and Japanese). Decisions on languages used, in all cases, depend on the specific Rules of Procedure for those Conventions.*

40. A comparison of Ramsar's language provision with that of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) was included in Document SC47-02. These two Conventions were identified because they provide a balance of languages similar to that of the Ramsar Convention.

41. In November 2016, conference calls were organized with the Secretariats of CMS, CITES and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to collect further information on their language provisions. These three Convention Secretariats stated that the cost of language provision was provided for from their respective core budgets. CITES and CMS also noted that past requests to increase the number of working languages, notably to include Arabic, had failed to find adequate support because of the associated costs.

42. Further information from the other secretariats is presented in Annex A.

**c) Ways forward to engage Contracting Parties in finding a step-by-step integration and financing of interpretation, translations of meeting documents and important Ramsar information documents into additional languages and**

**d) Potential timeline for phased integration of procedural changes, key indicators, and milestones for any UN languages added**

43. To make progress in the discussion of this subject, the approach proposed here is to identify the key goals and identify the route to each one, taking into account the specific requests in Resolution XII.3, paragraph 26.c). On this basis, the key goals could be suggested as follows:

- a) Agree a definition of "official language" and "working language" if both terms are to be used;
- b) Provide a full and equal language service for the current "official and working" languages of the Convention, English, French and Spanish;
- c) Introduce Arabic as an "official language" or "working language", as appropriate;
- d) If possible, introduce the other UN languages, Chinese and Russian, as "official languages" or "working languages" as appropriate.

44. The Secretariat invites the Standing Committee to consider the following approaches to achieve each of these goals.

**Goal a): Definitions of "official language" and "working language"**

45. The text of the Convention does not use the term "official language" or "working language". A discussion document that explored the use of these terms was presented at COP12, as document COP12 DOC. 17.
46. The Rules of Procedure of the Conference of the Contracting Parties use the term "official languages" throughout the rules. Rule 48, entitled "Official languages", states:  
*The official and working languages of the Conference of the Parties shall be English, French, and Spanish.*  
This creates an ambiguity because the term "working languages" is not used in any other rule. It is therefore not clear why this term is introduced in Rule 48.
47. The Standing Committee is invited to consider whether the term "working languages" should be retained in the Rules of Procedure and, if so, how it should be defined as distinct from "official languages".

**Goal b) An equal language service for English, French and Spanish**

48. There are two ways in which the language service in French and Spanish falls short of that for English. The first is that working group sessions and breakout sessions at meetings are generally in English only and are not interpreted. The second is that no translation or interpretation into French and Spanish is provided for the STRP.
49. It is not usual practice in other conventions to provide interpretation in working groups. This has therefore not been budgeted for the present exercise.
50. Regarding the provision of a full language service (translation and interpretation) in French and Spanish for the STRP, the estimated cost is CHF 315,000.
51. In order to achieve the provision of this service for the STRP, the following steps could be considered, at times to be determined by the CoP:
- a) Provide translation of key documents, to be determined by the Chair, within a budget determined by the CoP;
  - b) Provide translation of all documents;
  - c) Provide interpretation at meetings.
52. The Standing Committee is invited to comment on:
- a) whether these (or other) steps should be introduced simultaneously or in a phased approach;
  - b) if the introduction should be phased, at what time should they be introduced; and
  - c) how they should be funded.

**Goal c) Introduce Arabic as an official or working language, as appropriate**

53. The integration of Arabic into the work of the Convention requires the provision of document translation and interpretation for meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, the Standing Committee and the STRP, as well as the provision of new publications, the website and pre-existing reference documents such as resolutions and recommendations, manuals, etc. It

should be noted that each task also has implications for the workload and capacity of the Secretariat, including its language capacity.

54. To achieve such integration, the following steps could be considered, at times to be determined by the CoP or by the Standing Committee if this responsibility is delegated:

- a) For meetings of the CoP:
  - i) Provide translation of all documents;
  - ii) Provide interpretation;
- b) For meetings of the Standing Committee:
  - i) Provide translation of key documents, to be determined by the Chair, within a budget determined by the CoP;
  - ii) Provide translation of all documents;
  - iii) Provide interpretation in plenary sessions only;
  - iv) Provide interpretation in plenary sessions and in working groups that meet in the plenary room;
- c) For meetings of the STRP:
  - i) Provide translation of key documents, to be determined by the Chair, within a budget determined by the CoP;
  - ii) Provide translation of all documents;
  - iii) Provide interpretation;
- d) For provision of translations of other texts:
  - i) Provide translations of new web pages;
  - ii) Provide translations of pre-existing web pages;
  - iii) Provide translations of all new official documents;
  - iv) Provide translations of all new non-official and information documents;
  - v) Provide translations of pre-existing official reference documents;
  - vi) Provide in Arabic all documents that are provided in existing official languages.

55. The Standing Committee is invited to comment on:

- a) whether these (or other) steps should be introduced simultaneously or in a phased approach;
- b) if the introduction is to be phased, at what time should each step be introduced; and
- c) how they should be funded.

**Goal d) If possible, introduce the other UN languages as official or working languages, as appropriate**

56. The integration into the work of the Convention of each UN language would face the same requirements as the introduction of Arabic indicated above.

57. Consequently, with regard to Chinese and Russian, the Standing Committee is invited to comment on:

- a) whether the draft strategy to be presented at CoP13 should include a timetable for the introduction of these languages; and, if so
- b) whether the steps indicated in paragraph 52 above (or other steps) should be introduced simultaneously or in a phased approach for these languages;
- c) if the introduction is to be phased, at what time should each step be introduced; and
- d) how they should be funded.

## **Annex A Current provision of UN languages by selected biodiversity-related agreements**

1. A comparison of Ramsar's language provision with that of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) was included in Document SC47-02 submitted to the 47th Standing Committee meeting in 2014. These two Conventions were identified because they were considered as providing a similar balance of translation into English, French and Spanish to that of the Ramsar Convention.
2. In November 2016, conference calls were organized with the Secretariats of CMS, CITES and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to collect further information on their language provisions. These three Convention Secretariats explained that the cost of language provision was provided for from their respective core budgets. CITES and CMS also explained that requests in the past to include additional languages, such as Arabic, into their Convention's work had not been successful owing to the lack of core funding.

### Language provision by CBD

3. As with the other 'Rio Conventions', CBD acknowledges all six UN languages as working languages and so their core documents are translated into all six UN languages, i.e. for their Conference of Parties (COP) and meetings of the Subsidiary Bodies on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) and Implementation (SBI). Other documents are translated into English, French and Spanish only.
4. The CBD Secretariat outsources its translation work but said it was difficult to find good translators. As a result, it had been looking into computer-assisted terminology and translation software, such as that used by the United Nation's Joint International Annual Meeting on Computer-Assisted Translation and Terminology (JIAMCATT). This translation software is supposed to be tailored to UN text and better than 'Google translate'. CBD is using another computer-assisted translation software called TRADOS, which has a memory of words that have been translated before, but it still needs a translator to check the translation. Parties would inform the CBD Secretariat if there were mistakes with the translation and these would then be corrected in the software memory.
5. Other issues mentioned by the CBD Secretariat include that, for their website, it is the programme managers and partners who decide which items are translated. However, they noted that issues arose not only of translation but also regarding the layout of the text according to the different writing styles.

### Language provision by CITES

6. From the beginning of CITES, English, French and Spanish were the working languages of the Convention although several parts of the website are mainly in English. A request from Arabic-speaking to adopt Arabic as an official language did not receive sufficient support because of the budgetary implications.
7. The CITES Secretariat does not feel that there are particular challenges with implementation of the Convention in Arabic, Chinese and Russian speaking countries because Parties bring their own interpreters to the meetings when necessary and they also translate the key Resolutions and other documents into their own languages. The CITES Secretariat also employs staff with different language skills in order to build its own language capacity.

8. The CITES Secretariat also uses a computer-assisted translation software with a memory of past translations, called Multitrans, to translate some texts, and to make partial translation of documents to be sent to professional translators.

#### Language provision by CMS

9. English, French and Spanish have been the official languages of CMS from the beginning of the Convention and core documents relating to their Conference of Parties (COP), Standing Committee (SC) and their scientific body are translated into those languages. The website is mainly in English. In 1996, Algeria did try to ask for Arabic to be adopted as an official language but this was not accepted because of budget constraints.
10. The CMS Secretariat said that their Parties and partners were increasingly able to communicate in English and when CMS is working in the region, e.g. on Saiga antelopes, they would translate key project documents into Russian. The costs of translation are included in the budget for specific projects. CMS also received additional funding for translation from donors, e.g. GIZ or from NGOs.
11. The CMS Secretariat has staff who mainly speak English, French or Spanish. However, they have an Arabic-speaking staff member at the office in the United Arab Emirates, who helps to communicate throughout the region. As with CBD, CMS also uses a 'UN Terminology Database'.