

Ramsar Asia Regional Meeting (May 13-16, 2005, Beijing)

The Asian Regional Meeting on the Convention on Wetlands was held from May 13 to 16, 2005, in Beijing, China. One of the Ramsar regional (Africa, Asia, Europe, the Neotropics, North America, and Oceania) COP9 preparatory meetings, it was hosted by the State Forestry Administration of China (China's Ramsar Administrative Authority), with financial support from the government of China and SIDA (Sweden International Development Agency), and it provided an opportunity to review the current implementation of the Convention in Asia, to discuss regional issues, and make inputs to draft technical resolutions for COP9. The meeting was attended by more than 120 participants from 24 Contracting Parties (out of 26 CPs in Asia, of which Bahrain and Jordan apologized), and 7 pre-accession countries, Ramsar's IOPs, regional organizations (ICIMOD, INBAR), NGOs, and universities. A list of participants in the meeting is attached as an annex to this report.

Agenda item 1: Opening remarks (9:30-10:00, May 13, 2005)

Peter Bridgewater, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention, chaired the opening session. He welcomed all the participants to the Asia Regional meeting and briefly introduced the purpose of the meeting. He then invited the Vice Minister, **Zhao Xuemin**, of the State Forestry Administration of China to make the opening remarks.

Zhao Xuemin first welcomed all national delegates and participants from international organizations, NGOs and universities. In his speech, he highlighted the rich and extensive wetlands diversity in China, and the commitment of the Chinese government for wetland conservation and implementation of the Ramsar Convention. To date, China has designated 30 Ramsar sites and established 433 wetland reserves, which cover about 40% of the wetlands in China. A pilot demonstration on wetland conservation, in Sanjiangyuan and Ruoergai, the water tower for Asia, has been launched under China's "eco-security" construction scheme. In future, China will cooperate with Ramsar Convention and other international organizations for the work on wetlands, both in China and especially for Himalayan Regional Initiative.

Peter Bridgewater appreciated the word "eco-security" from Vice Minister Zhao's remarks and emphasized that this will be a future direction of Ramsar Convention, in the "evolution of Ramsar Convention".

Chihiro Atsumi (Minister, Embassy of Japan to P. R. China) made an opening remark on behalf of Standing Committee Representatives for Asia. In his speech, Mr. Atsumi made an overview of the progress of Ramsar Convention since Kushiro COP5 in 1993, number of Contracting Parties in the region having increased from 11 to 26, which is a good indicator of awareness concerning wetlands. He welcomed Myanmar as Ramsar's new Party and noted that Japan has provided assistance for Myanmar in conducting wetland inventory and other activities. Since the Indian Ocean Tsunami disaster in 2004, the significant functions of mangrove ecosystems have been well recognized. Japan has voluntarily contributed small grants to NGOs to carry out rapid assessment of the coastal wetlands. He also pointed out that the Asian Wetland Symposium 2005 co-hosted by Japan and India was very successful.

Peter Bridgewater acknowledged the contribution of Japan to the Ramsar Convention, as well as that of other donor agencies, especially SIDA for supporting this meeting (but which apologized for being unable to send representative to the meeting).

David Pritchard (Birdlife International), on behalf of the four Ramsar International Organization Partners, offered three other simple watchwords to think about in this meeting.

- The first is “effectiveness”. The Convention is finding new ways to measure the difference it makes to outcomes for wetland ecosystems.
- The second is “profile”. This is not just celebrating events or progress when they go well. Better awareness is fundamental to whether we really make the right kind of difference or not. Ramsar’s principles, objectives and solutions are simply not well enough known amongst wider resource management agencies, the business sector, the public, politicians, prime ministers and presidents. Let’s make sure we don’t just talk to ourselves, but take everything that happens here to those other levels, too.
- And thirdly, “interdependence”. Let’s understand better and work with the interdependencies of water and wetlands, of ecosystem services and livelihoods, of neighboring countries, of different types of stakeholders.

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda. It was adopted quickly.

Agenda item 3: Briefing on COP9 themes and preparations (10:30-10:45, 13 May)

Peter Bridgewater made a presentation with the title: The “Road from Beijing to Kampala via New York (Water Agenda) and on to Mexico (Water Forum)”, including the following key points:

- Our COP is not an island. It is closely linked to other multinational conventions.
- COP9 preparation: the STRP12 meeting in Feb. 2005 was very successful for setting guidelines.
- After this Beijing meeting, four regional meetings will be completed with a possibility of an Oceania meeting.
- The theme of COP9 is “Wetlands and Water: Supporting Life and Sustaining Livelihoods”. The conference venue in Uganda is very attractive.
- COP9 documentation will be made available through the website and CD-ROM and the number of information papers will be reduced through online registration procedures.
- From now on, STRP Technical Review and methods papers will be published in a new Ramsar Technical Report Series.
- Standing Committee 31 Agenda:
 - Synergies with other convention;
 - Transnational Ramsar sites & regional initiatives (such as Ramsar Centre in Iran, Himalayan Initiatives);
 - Strategic framework for the implementation of the Convention;
 - Role of the Convention in natural disaster prevention.
- The budget has to be realistic, and therefore the Secretariat is looking for options allowing regional capacity growth, as well as outsourced STRP service to be set up at the Secretariat.
- World Wetlands Day in 2005 was successful.

Agenda item 4: Report on Implementation of the Ramsar Convention in China (10:45 – 11:05, 13 May)

Yin Hong, Deputy Director General for the Office of Ramsar Convention Implementation of China, reported to the meeting on the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in China, including seven aspects:

- **Inventory and assessment:** First inventory completed, and results disseminated to the public. Assessment indicates that major threats have been reclamation and pollution.
- **Policies and legislation:** Policies are completed, and national legislation is under review.
- **National Strategy:** National Wetland Policy adopted by the State Council, and wetland conservation has been built in the national plan of other governmental agencies responsible for marine, land use, water and environment. National Wetland Conservation Programme has been approved by the State Council.
- **Wetland conservation:** 30 Ramsar sites, 400 Nature Reserves, protection of mangrove, water allocation and construction of wetland parks in Hongkong are underway.
- **Ramsar sites:** In 2004, 9 new Ramsar sites, including 8 high altitude sites, which makes China's Ramsar sites total up to 30, on its way to the target of 80 Ramsar sites for the year 2030.
- **Public awareness, education and training:** Expansion and improvement of facilities such as training center, educational center, etc. 1500 trained at Maipo in Hongkong, substantial amount of CEPA activities have been organized each year, including Wetland Ambassador's Campaign, continuously printing WWD posters in Chinese each year (2003-2005).
- **International cooperation:** Successful cooperation with WI, WWF, UNDP/GEF in developing national wetland action plan, policies, training, and project on the ground.

Agenda item 5: Implementation of Ramsar Convention in Asia: A regional review (Chaired by Peter Bridgewater, 11:00 – 12:00, 13 May)

Yasaman Rajabkhah, Iranian Delegate, on behalf of Standing Committee Representatives for Asia, reported to the meeting that currently Asia has 26 Contracting Parties with 175 Ramsar Sites, of which 35 new sites have been added since COP8. She then pointed out that there are 12 sites on the list of the Montreux Record, but none of these have officially requested to be removed from the list since COP8. Since COP8, international cooperation has been rather active, especially as a number of regional initiatives have been developed, such as the Himalayan Initiatives to secure the water tower for Asia; Asia Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy (85 sites joined the networks across 13 countries); the Ramsar Regional Centre for western and central Asia, which was launched in Iran in February 2005; the MedWet Initiative –

Asian countries actively cooperated with the MedWet Initiative; the Dushanbe Water Forum for the conservation of Pamir water, an initiative which started in 2003; and Lower Mekong Wetland conservation.

However, there are substantial challenges for Asia. According to the national reports, activities of the National Ramsar Committees are overall weak, Asia needs more funding sources to finance Small Grants Fund (SGF) proposals from the region, Asian countries need more communications among Parties, as well as between Parties and the Ramsar Secretariat.

Discussions on the regional review:

Q (Republic of Korea): ROK have added one more Ramsar site recently.

Q (China) Impact of railway construction in Tibet-Qinhai plateau has been minimized by construction of a bridge over the wetlands.

Q (Chilika Development Authority, India): Training programme also started in Chilika. (RCJ will explain more about the Asian Wetland Symposium.)

Q (Israel): 6 initiatives are in Asia. Approach of the MedWet is a transregional and not a subregional initiative.

Q (Global Environment Centre): Secretariat requested information related to regional initiatives. Peatland Initiative is a good case of regional initiative.

Q (Japan): Thanked Japan's focal countries for sending national reports for this regional view;

Q (Vietnam): Developing countries need more funding (such as small funds) from outside of the country.

Dr. Lei emphasized the limits of funding – although Asian SGF proposals' quality has been rather high and most of the submitted proposals deserve funding, with current resources, only fewer than 20% of the proposals can be funded.

Agenda item 6: Technical Session I: Special Issues Related to Asia in COP9, chaired by Yusra Khan (Indonesia Delegate, SC Representative) (13:30 – 15:45, 13 May)

David Pritchard introduced draft COP9 Resolutions that have high relevance to Asia. He presented the overall plan and the types of Resolution to be adopted by COP9 in Kampala in November, concentrating on those proposals which cover scientific and technical matters. He then explained that the approach to be taken to this at COP9 differs from previous COPs, partly in response to the COP8 Resolution VIII.45 on the effectiveness of Ramsar's decision-making processes. Among other things, two primary consolidated "portmanteau" Resolutions will enable the whole of the Convention's scientific and technical agenda to be seen in strategic overview, helping Parties to consider resourcing implications and prioritization.

Some of the specific COP9DRs introduced, such as

- 1) DR1: 5 new wise use guidelines documents.
 - Conceptual framework for wise use and ecological character
 - Inventory assessment, and monitoring plus rapid assessment
 - Integrated framework for water-related guidance as well as river basin management, environmental flow and ground water management
 - Revised strategic framework and guidelines for the list of Ramsar site
 - Ecological indicators of effectiveness of implementation (new approach)
- 2) DR2: Future implementation of science and technical aspects of the Convention
 - 11 topics are included in DR2.
 - Proposals due to be tabled at the Standing Committee in June include.

- 3) DR3: Outcomes of CSD13 (wetland and water)
- 4) DR4: Conservation and sustainable use of fish resources
- 5) DR5: Synergies with other conventions
- 6) DR6: Transnational Ramsar sites
- 7) DR7: Guidelines for addressing Ramsar sites which no longer meet the criteria for designation.
- 8) DR8: Regional initiatives
- 9) DR10: Role of Ramsar Convention in the natural disaster prevention
- 10) DR15: Wetland and poverty reduction

He stressed that the new Resolutions will be better, complete and coherent. In addition, the implementation aspect of the Resolutions was emphasized. STRP is a true “powerhouse” of the Ramsar Convention, and the contribution from COP is essential for STRP to make better Resolutions.

Discussions:

Peter Bridgewater: A simple and effective strategic plan is needed. Possibly in COP10, a new style of national report may appear.

Ajit Pattnaik: He suggested capacity building for the better implementation of guidance. The eco-tourism issue was proposed by Iranian delegate; ecological water and environmental flow were discussed; Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and Millennium Development Goals were discussed as well.

Agenda item 7: Technical Session II: Building Wetland Conservation into Asian Sustainable Development (Chaired by Iran, 16:00 – 18:00, 13 May)

This technical session served for the participants to share experiences on the linkage among water, wetlands and people’s livelihoods, the linkage among wetlands, biodiversity and culture. It is essential to encapsulate these issues into sustainable development, involving stakeholders (via CEPA programme). This is an urgent need for Asia, with its high density of human populations with limited natural resources, to build wetland conservation into sustainable development at different levels. The Ramsar Secretariat invited four speakers for this session.

Mike Ounsted, the chair of Wetlands International’s Working Group on Wetlands and Livelihoods, presented his experience in Asia (especially in the Mekong countries) on water, wetland, and livelihoods. Mike pointed out that after 30 years’ implementation of the Ramsar Convention, it is important that governments recognize that ‘wetlands’ are about ‘water’, that water is dynamic and does not remain in one site, and that ‘wise use’ means ‘sustainable development’. Sustainable use of water and managing water bodies sustainably is now recognized as being critical for food security, minimizing risk of disaster, and the development of national and regional economies, on which people’s livelihoods depend. However, the connection between livelihoods and wetlands is not always being made. He raised issues of local community suffer/cut off their income either to secure the wetland service to the downstream, or due to developments upstream. It is important for decision-makers to look at the issues from an ecosystem approach, putting people at the center. Addressing water and livelihood issues will be the key to maintaining the effectiveness of Ramsar’s wetland conservation goals.

Sebastia Semene Guitart, Convention Development Officer of the Ramsar Convention Secretariat, presented the links among wetlands, culture and biodiversity, from the perspective of archaeology, economy, sociology and anthropology, in particular, cultural values of wetlands. He

requested reporting of good cases on the importance of cultural values in Asian wetlands. Towards the end of his presentation, he requested all CPs to submit national reports, with a simplified version if countries have difficulties to complete the full national report. The deadline for submission is 30th of June.

Sandra Hails, CEPA Programme Officer of the Ramsar Secretariat, presented the Ramsar CEPA programme and its role in wetland conservation. She highlighted some excellent examples of CEPA, such as Mekong River, Dongting Lake, Kuala Gula, Chilika Lagoon, and sent out the message that CEPA should not be considered as an add-on in wetland conservation. It is an integral part of wetland management, and therefore we should invest more efforts on CEPA. Then she informed the participants that a regional network will be established in the coming summer (Wetland Link International Network). Finally she stressed the need for the nomination of CEPA focal points (government and NGO).

Professor Wen Yali, from Beijing Forestry University, presented his work on financing wetland conservation in China. He explained detailed breakdowns of financial mechanisms for wetland conservation in China. Up to now, government level investment has played an important role in wetland conservation. However, unstable and unbalanced investments are still a problem. In addition, investment is fragmentary and ecological compensation is not enough. Public finance system is strongly needed in China.

Discussions

Q: Compensation programmes at high altitude wetlands in China were discussed.

Q: Role of NGOs in CEPA is important.

Agenda item 8: Group discussion on regional or subregional initiatives (9:00 – 11: 00, May 14, 2005)

Group I: Himalayan Initiative

Group II: Water Bird Flyways

Group III: CEPA/Ramsar Centers

Group IV: Peatland Wise Use

Following are detail minutes of the group discussion. All had been reported to Plenary Session before the end of the morning 14 May, at 11:00 – 12:00.

Group 1: Himalaya Initiative

Chair: China (Li Shijie & Yu Xiubo), Rapporteur: Wetlands International (Anna van Paddenburg)

Lei Guanchun highlighted the aim of the Himalaya Initiative, which is to conserve unique high altitude wetlands in the mountain systems of Himalaya, Hindu Kush and Pamir Alay in Asia. It is the source of many rivers: Indus, Ganges, Amu Darya, Saluween, Kabul, Konar, Brahmaputra, Mekong, Yellow River, and Yangtze River --- in other words, the water tower of Asia. The draft framework presented to the parties of the region is a result of a series of workshops. Dr Lei emphasized the need for the parties to critically go through the draft framework during this session. With the agreement of the relevant parties, at COP9 in Kampala this framework can be endorsed and encouraged.

Zhang Xiaohong, deputy director of Wetlands International China Office, firstly thanked WWF for supporting the workshops needed to get the Initiative recognized. She updated the progress of the EU Asia Pro Eco Programme, which was approved and will start some time in August.

The commitment letter from the EC has been received, however the contract is still under development. She stated that the length of the project is two years and the total cost will be EUR 500,000, of which EUR 375,000 has been committed by the EU through the Asia Pro Eco Programme. She briefly summarized the objectives of the project, which will be implemented in China, India, Bhutan and Nepal in the coming two years by Wetlands International, ICIMOD and other partners, and most importantly the governments of the four countries.

Comments on the draft framework

The draft framework was basically agreed by Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Pakistan, Tajikistan. Other countries did not join the session. International organizations represented (WWF, WI, ICIMOD, Birdlife) also agreed on the framework, with following recommendations:

- Addition to preamble: Recognize these wetlands are critical for livelihoods and indigenous people and provide environmental services to downstream users; another addition was recommended on the awareness of the uncertainty that wetlands ecosystem and local people are facing due to climate change and economic development.
- Language re-editing: change “research and generation of information” in objective 3 into ‘Research and generate information’, and “management” in objective 4 into “manage”.
- Suggested wording for Objective 6, develop and implement policies for conservation and management of Himalayan mountain wetlands, and ‘all contracting parties shall list high altitude wetland conservation as a priority area and incorporate it into their relevant law and policy, action plan, national plan and financial input.
- Comments on paragraph 4 on partners in the committee, it is important to make it clear that governments and IOPs have different roles and functions in the implementation of the Himalayan Initiative.
- It was also requested to stress the link of local people and wetlands in the overall objective and to develop a reward mechanism through public and private partnership as one of the objectives.
- The applicability of community involvement in management under Objective 4 is not clear and needs to be clarified. Another point was raised on who should /should not be part of the Steering Committee. This needs further discussion. Finally, the meeting agreed that the next steps which needed to be taken were as follows: while Lei Guanchun coordinates the finalization of the draft framework, all countries involved will do internal consultations, and a revised version should be discussed at the next workshop, which has been tentatively planned in India.

Other issues expressed by parties

- **Afghanistan** requested attention to wetlands in Afghanistan after the suffering of the environment and its people during the long war.
- **Pakistan** presented aUNDP/GEF project on wetlands conservation and management for coming 7 years, with a total budget of 12 million (GEF, PAK,WWF, NL, poverty alleviation funds) to be implemented by WWF Pakistan and to focus on Demo sites: coastal, arid, semi-arid, mountain and alpine (wetlands complexes.
- **Lebanon** expressed interest in the Himalaya Initiative. A similar example was presented from Lebanon. Lebanon has a chain of mountains up to 3000m and it is

recognized that this chain of mountains acts as a reservoir for the surrounding countries. Now the area is threatened by tourisms, ski resorts, and hotels. The stress is mostly on the top of the mountains. Lebanon highlighted the importance of considering both quality and quantity of water.

In conclusion, Lei Guanchun emphasized that the framework will be tool for fundraising and development of national programmes.

Group II Water Bird Flyways (Chaired by Japan, rapporteur, WI, 9:00 – 11:00 14 May)

Following are a summary that was reported to the plenary; detailed minutes and presentations are included in annex (PDF file).

- Long history of endorsement from the Ramsar Convention;
- Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy (initiated in 1996, two 5 year periods);
- Major achievements of the *Strategy* has been the development of a network of over 80 sites across 13 countries in the East Asian – Australasian Flyway;
- However, much work remains and needs to be ongoing!
- Existing framework (Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Strategy) finishes in 2005;
- Decision taken by key stakeholders to focus work into two initiatives:

1. East Asian – Australasian Flyway

- Developing the post-2005 framework using the WSSD Type II initiative model
- Partnership Text and Action Plan being drafted
- Meeting to finalise *Partnership* in October 2005
- Ramsar “Regional Initiative” proposed for CoP9 to give greater recognition to the Partnership activities

2. Central Asian Flyway

- CMS led development of Flyway Action Plan
- Existing Siberian Crane MOU and GEF UNEP Project provide an opportunity to initiative the development of a Waterbird Site Network in part of the Flyway
- CMS Flyway meeting in India in June to discuss and endorse the Action Plan and an institutional framework

Group III CEPA/Ramsar Centers (Chaired by Iran, Rapporteur Ramsar Center Japan, 9:00-11:00 14 May)

1. Ramsar Regional Centre Iran

An informative presentation was made by **Yasaman Rajabkhah** on the Terms of Reference for the Centre and a discussion followed. There was a discussion on how the centre should be developed, whether it should follow the set-up of the MedWet Initiative, the Panama Centre or some other model, for example, the set-up in Japan with ILEC, Kushiro IWC and Ramsar Centre Japan.

- There were concerns over the financing of the centre and a discussion of whether it could eventually be financed like MedWet or Panama Centre or by some other means.
- The centre should focus on the special wetland issues of the region.
- While English should be the main operating language, there is a need to work in Arabic, Russian and Persian to give it regional significance.

2. CEPA activities throughout the region

The Chair asked the delegates present to share their experiences within their countries in CEPA.

- **Korea** highlighted the problem of exchanging expertise between education centres (interpretation centres) and the need to improve on this. The WLI network can facilitate this through their experience so far in setting up a national network in Australia and the setting up of the Asian Regional Network.
- **Vietnam** discussed the challenges of developing a CEPA programme in the country. At the moment delivering the wetland message to local communities is difficult and there is a need to have more impact at the school level. It was mentioned that there is a National Biodiversity Strategy, and it was suggested that wetland CEPA could be delivered through this since there is funding available here. It was noted, however, that this could potentially weaken the wetland impact.
- **China** noted that they have a very effective government-supported CEPA programme of the NGOs' work going on in their wetland centers.
- **Malaysia** (The Malayan Nature Society) reported on their successful school nature club project with over 200 schools involved and endorsed by the Ministry of Education.
- There was a discussion of the two different approaches being used in the region, top-down vs. bottom-up. In the case of top-down countries it was emphasized that identifying and using a key political figure was a very effective way to gain acceptance of an effective wetland CEPA programme.
- CEPA in the region can be included formal education curricula at the municipal level especially where there is a Ramsar site in the municipality.
- **Israel** highlighted the importance of their new law which recognizes that nature is legally recognized as a water user, giving much greater strength to wetland work and opening the way for more effective CEPA work such as their nature-water-landscape.
- **China** emphasized the importance of working with key policy makers as a starting point to get them on board for wetland conservation – taking them to sites, etc., proved very successful. They now are making great use of the NGO involvement in CEPA, especially WWF and IUCN, and identified their main weakness at the government level at the moment as developing more community-oriented wetland awareness programmes.
- The countries asked the Secretariat to collect success stories and CEPA methods electronically and make these available through the CEPA e-lists and Web sites.

Group IV Peatland Wise Use (Chaired by Tatiana Minaeva, Peatland representative on the STRP and Rapporteur was Faizal Parish of the Global Environment Centre, 9:00-11:00 14 May)

Twenty-five representatives from nine countries were present, namely Brunei, China, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Republic of Korea, Russia, and four international organizations (International Mire Conservation Group, Global Environment Centre, IUCN, Wetlands International), and the Ramsar Secretariat.

Tatiana Minayeva provided background on the issue of peatlands in relation to the Ramsar Convention and the guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands. The work of the Coordinating Committee for GAP was discussed and there was an introduction to the issues identified by the drafting group from CCGAP.

Chen Kelin (Wetlands International) introduced characteristics of peatlands in Northeast Asia and the common issues. Key issues were identified as drainage, degradation, and overgrazing. The statement from the July 2004 international workshop on peatlands (Lanzhou Statement) was distributed.

Faizal Parish presented tropical peatlands in Southeast Asia (ASEAN Peatland Management Initiative).

Cui Lijuan, Chinese Academy of Forestry representative on the STRP, reported to the meeting that China is establishing a wetland monitoring stations network, and this will be important in assessing the nature and trends of peatlands in the country. The Chinese government is increasingly aware of the importance of peatlands and hopes to develop further measures to build on the Ramsar Resolution VIII.17.

Eui-Joon Park, Ministry of the Environment, Republic of Korea, reported their work on monitoring mountainous peatlands since 2002; Jangdo island High Moor is newly designated Ramsar site (March 2005). This peatland plays a key role in storing freshwater and water supply to the people on the island, apart from its importance for biodiversity conservation.

CCGAP recommendations

In principle the priority issues raised by the CCGAP group were generally supported, but there needs to be some fine-tuning of the wording as well as a further process of consultation at the national level on the revised texts provided by the Secretariat. Comment was made that appropriate institutional and financial mechanisms are needed to support the implementation of activities on peatlands, including a partnership among relevant stakeholders – building on the CCGAP and linking to subregional mechanisms in different regions. Given the importance of peatlands, the recommendations on peatlands should be highlighted appropriately in the special draft Resolutions (DR1 or DR2) or as a separate statement.

Development of specific subregional activities on peatlands

Southeast Asia: The group noted the importance of peatlands in Southeast Asia, given that they cover 30 million hectares, represent more than 60% of the world's tropical peatlands, and are very important for conservation of biodiversity, carbon storage, water regulation and support for local livelihoods. The meeting supported the work undertaken by the 10 ASEAN countries to develop the ASEAN Peatland Management Initiative and associated ASEAN peatland Management Strategy, and it recommended that this be recognized appropriately as a model of a mechanism to implement the Ramsar Convention in the region.

Northeast Asia. The group recognized the importance of peatlands in Northeast Asia and noted some of the priorities identified in the Langzhou statement. The group supported the establishment of a Northeast Asia peat (information exchange) network and welcomed the offer of Wetlands International China, IMCG and others to develop this network through their ongoing collaborative programme. It was noted that Russia has very important peatlands in the Asian region and has a strong interest in networking and exchange in the region. This should not be constrained by the (artificial) Ramsar regional arrangements. The group encouraged further work between the countries of the Northeast Asian region to share experience and best practice and establish an appropriate framework for formal cooperation on peatland management.

Other subregions: Peatlands in the arid/semi arid subregions of central and western Asia may also benefit from a regional exchange mechanism.

Inclusion of peatlands in existing and proposed subregional initiatives

The issue of peatland management should be included more clearly in the following subregional activities: Himalayan Initiative, Mekong Region, and Amur Region. Make a stronger connection of peatlands with climate change adaptation and mitigation initiatives and plans.

Inclusion of peatlands in other Resolutions for COP9

The group call upon CCGGAP and Ramsar Secretariat to integrate peatlands issues in relevant COP9 Resolutions, basing on the following recommendations on peatlands from the Asian Ramsar Meeting.

1. Recognize the importance of peatlands in the Asian Region for biodiversity conservation, water regulation and climate balance and urge CPs in the region to strengthen the action for improving the protection, including designation of more protected areas and Ramsar sites and stopping unsustainable harvesting and development practices.
2. Recognizing the lack of information on extent, status and values of peatlands, encourage intensified efforts for assessment, inventory and monitoring activities.
3. Aware that many peatlands in Asia have been degraded by inappropriate and unsustainable management activities applied often not recognizing their unique wetlands character and functions, urge that peatlands are managed and restored according their ecological and hydrological character in harmony with local knowledge and systems; develop practical guidance on sustainable peatland management and rehabilitation as well as establishment of demonstration and pilot sites.
4. Recognizing that many local people depend on goods and services from peatlands in Asia but that peatland degradation reduces livelihood options and contributes to poverty while at the same time local communities are often not involved in the management of peatlands. Therefore peatland management in Asia should be undertaken wherever possible in conjunction with local communities and other stakeholders and seek to optimize the benefits to such communities from sustainable peatland management.
5. Agree on the important need to strengthen cooperation and exchange of experience on peatland management and use in Asia and because of the similarity in management issues

in different subregions propose a subregional approach for regional cooperation as follows:

- a) Welcome the establishment of the ASEAN Peatland Management Initiative, encourage parties and international organizations to support its implementation and commend it as a model to other subregions and elsewhere;
 - b) Support the immediate establishment of a NEAsian Peatland Network as recommended by the Langzhou Workshop and encourage active participation in such a network as a first step towards more formal cooperation among countries in the region; and
 - c) Encourage further discussions on the establishment of regional exchange mechanisms related to the mountain peatlands of Central Asia which are facing similar management problems.
6. Peatland issues should be incorporated in and highlighted by other regional wetland initiatives such as Himalayan wetlands, Amur basin management, Mekong Basin wetlands.
 7. The recommendations from CCGAP to the COP should be further strengthened and incorporate issues from the Asian perspective.

Agenda item 9: Technical session IV The Indian Ocean tsunami & coastal Wetland management (13:30-14:30, 14, May, chaired by Chair: Japan) Rapporteur: A.K.Pattnaik, Chief Executive Chilika development authority, India

Faizal Parish (Global Environment Center) presented “Recommendations for Action from the special session of the Asian Wetland Symposium on Tsunami and Coastal Wetland Management”. Faizal Parish portrayed large-scale devastation by the recent tsunami in the Indian Ocean to the life, property and coastal ecosystem. He mentioned the significant role played by the coastal wetlands by way of reducing the impact of the tsunami, particularly the mangrove, coastal plantations and the peat lands.

He mentioned that the special session on the tsunami at AWS 2005 on 9th February 2005 was very important as it was just 45 days after this devastating natural calamity. He congratulated the organizers and the co-organizers for holding this important event at such short period. Drawing examples from various affected countries, he explained the role of the coastal wetlands in terms of reducing the impacts of the natural calamities. He elaborated on the seven specific recommendations adopted at the special session on the tsunami on 9th February at Bhubaneswar, India.

Taej Mundkar (Wetlands International) explained the objectives of the Ramsar Tsunami Reference Group, which was constituted on the behest of the Ramsar Secretariat with a broad objective to make an assessment of the impact of the tsunami on the coastal wetlands of affected countries. He cited examples from various affected countries and portrayed the role of the coastal ecosystem in reducing the impact of tsunami. However, he pointed out that the assessment of the impact of tsunami on a number of coastal wetlands is yet to be completed. Finally, He encouraged participants to pay attention to the website, <http://www.wetlands.org/tsunami/default.htm>, either to contribute to the information or to make use of the information collected and collated in the website.

Agenda item 10: Technical Session V : Code of conduct for Mangrove Forest Management (Chair; Peter Bridgewater, Secretary General, Ramsar Convention Secretariat, Rapporteur: A.K.Pattnaik, Chief executive Chilika development authority, India 14:45 – 18:00, 14 May)

Professor Donald J. Macintosh, Centre for Tropical Ecosystems Research, made a presentation on mainstreaming conservation of coastal biodiversity through formulation of a code of conduct for sustainable management of mangrove ecosystems. At the outset he clarified that the project is to develop a document for a better understanding about the management of mangrove ecosystem. He mentioned various stages of the evolution of the project, i.e., how the draft code was arrived at based on the country case studies, followed by three regional workshops (Asian, African, and the Americas) and then a review workshop at Washington, D.C. He further mentioned that following the peer review of the articles, the individual article became “guideline”, but he explained that based on the consensus the document was renamed “*principles* for a code of conduct for the management and sustainable use of mangrove ecosystem” and the 15 Articles were re-designated as “principles”. He mentioned that the draft principles are being put to field testing in two sites in Brazil and Vietnam. He explained that the next step would be to pass the ownership of the document to the public domain.

This was followed by a brief presentation by **Lei Guangchun**, Ramsar Senior Advisor Asia – Pacific, on the outcome of the Americas and the Africa regional meetings. He mentioned that the document was distributed quite late so the participants had little time to go through it. He underscored some of the key points like EIA and more explicit explanation of the tourism and the cultural values, etc., suggested in the above meetings.

Professor D Macintosh in his second presentation threw more light on the 15 principles. He clarified that the document is not a solution to every problem. The specific needs are so divergent that it is very difficult to address everything through one document.

The response from the participants:

- Simple replacement of the word Article by Principle need to be given more serious thought.
- For tourism, carrying capacity should be given its weight.
- Financing and cost recovery mechanism.
- It should be a document of principle rather than the code of conduct.

Specific response from the participants:

The delegate from **China** mentioned that the management of mangrove in China has evolved through ages, and the conservation, restoration and planting of the native species have been a priority of the Chinese Government. He suggested that the essence of the traditional management practices from various countries should be incorporated. The delegate from **Vietnam** commented that the document should be more explicit to meet the needs of the various countries to serve as a guide.

Guangchun Lei suggested that the flow of sediment might not always be considered detrimental to the mangrove vegetation. Regarding tourism he mentioned that in addition to the

carrying capacity it should be more explicit for the benefit of the local communities. He suggested to include one principle, or to modify principle 4, to consider integration of large-scale (landscape scale) and long-term ecological processes.

Dr Pattnaik mentioned that the fresh flow from the drainage basin is very important for the health of the mangrove ecosystem. The alteration of flow upstream may have significant impact on the mangrove ecosystem. So the ecological flow and the management of the drainage basin must be emphasized.

The Secretary General suggested that since the wise use concept is going to be redefined in terms of ecosystem service delivery, it needs to be appropriately modified. He further mentioned that the mechanism for consideration of the document by the next Standing Committee needs to be explored. He thanked the presenter as well all the participants for the active participation.

Agenda item 11: Outcomes of the Asian Wetland Symposium (Chaired by Iran & Ramsar Secretariat, Rapporteur: Alvin Lopez, IUCN, 9:00 – 9:30, 16 May)

Toru Iwama, President of Ramsar Center Japan, introduced objectives of the RCJ and diverse membership. Since its inception in 1990, AWS had been organized by RCJ to promote sharing experiences on wetland conservation, research and education. AWS 2005 was organized by RCJ, CDA, Dept of Forests, the Orissa State Government of India, co-organized by MoE Japan, Ministry of Environment and Forests, India, and Wetlands International. The main outcomes of the AWS are the Chilika Statement and a special session on tsunami.

S. P. Nanda, Principal Secretary of Forests, Orissa State, India, presented a summary of the recommendations of the AWS and also mentioned that livelihood as one of the key issues for wetland conservation and management. (note: AWS2005 recommendations, Chilika Statement is included in the annex).

Noriko Moriwake (Ministry of Environment, Japan) introduced the history of the AWS and past outcomes and how they contributed to the proceedings of the Ramsar COPs. She emphasized that the AWS has been providing information exchange opportunities and building successful partnerships, providing a platform to discuss transboundary issues, and complementing Ramsar regional activities in Asia, as well as providing an opportunity to discuss technical issues that are becoming increasingly difficult to discuss at Ramsar COPs. Therefore, we should continue this mechanism and encourage participants to disseminate the outcomes of the AWS, such as the Chilika Statement, link the AWS forum to Ramsar regional activities, and promote the model to other Ramsar regions.

Agenda item 12: Presentation by Republic of Korea on the hosting Ramsar COP 10 (Chaired by Iran and Ramsar Secretariat, 9:30 – 9:50 16, May)

Seukwoo Kang, Deputy Director, Global Environment Office, Ministry of Environment, started with Korea's historical association with Ramsar, and then made an overview of wetlands, wetland policies and activities including designation of wetland protected areas, CEPA programme and promoting international cooperation. Then, he presented why COP 10 should be in Korea, emphasizing the following aspects:

- A variety of wetlands with international significance;

- Its contribution to international efforts to address global environmental challenges;
- Strong support of local communities and NGOs;
- Korea has “know-how” and infrastructure based on past global events hosted by ROK.

Then, he presented their proposals to host Ramsar COP10, which includes organization of the conference and provision of conference services, such as conference centre of UN standards, professional logistical support, its capacity to accommodate parallel events (1500 delegates and 2000 local participants) and offer wetlands study tour opportunities. A conceptual operational plan was presented, with an estimated local cost of US\$2.5 million.

There was general support to the proposal by ROK on hosting COP10. The following CPs indicated specific support: Iran, Japan, Indonesia, China, Thailand, Philippines, and Vietnam.

Thailand asked about the dates of COP10, and it was responded around autumn-winter 2008, or in November 2008, but still in discussion with the Secretariat on a suitable time.

Agenda item 13: Open Session for discussion of other issues/items (Chaired by Iran and Ramsar Secretariat, 10:05 – 11:00, 16 May)

Lei Guangchun introduced two items: SGF and future Asia Regional Meeting.

- Encourage to propose to COP to set up further mechanism for financial support, as Contracting Parties in Asia are not receiving enough funds for wetland conservation and management. Asian countries have the capacity to write high quality proposals but insufficient financial resources to draw upon.
- Asian Ramsar Meeting – it has been proposed that in the future instead of organizing subregional meetings, we have an Asian meeting.

Pakistan comment:

- That Ramsar establishes to gather support for proposal development.

Tatiana Minaeva, STRP member, presented a concept on Green Belt of Amur for Integrated River Basin Management, a similar regional initiative to Himalayan or Mekong river.

Pakistan called for success stories on CEPA to be presented and requested a format to submit these success stories.

Sandra Hails said that follow-up will be done based on government and NGO CEPA focal points. Parties are encouraged to submit updated contacts for these focal points with whom Secretariat can communicate effectively.

Vietnam presented the outcomes of a side event organized by Wetlands International on Sunday evening, on the discussion on DR15 on Wetlands and Poverty Reduction. Comments include the following points:

- a. The addition of a reference to Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, as these were highly relevant to many countries in the region;

- b. The addition of a clause specifying that “Wetland ecosystems deliver a wide range of critical services for human well-being and these services will continue to be a critical basis for improved livelihoods of the significant numbers of the world’s currently most economically and socially excluded people who live in or near wetlands”;
- c. The addition of a comment that drew attention to the fact that the Resolution should not just target poverty reduction but the vulnerability of risk to wetland dependent people of falling into poverty;
- d. Public awareness, although addressed to a certain extent in points 5 and 6, should be further emphasised;
- e. The current draft clause that related to Africa-specific interventions should be extended to Asian or global options;
- f. The importance of population management could be included in the draft. As the primary concern of the text is actions rather than causes, it was suggested this come in the preamble rather than the main body of the directive. (note: redrafted DR15 is included in the annex).

Vietnam also asked the Secretariat to take further action on the synergies on Ramsar, CBD and other Conventions, e.g. how to combine the national reports, and Ramsar should take more effort for funding opportunities from GEF. The Vietnam Project Management Unit of the Mekong Wetland Biodiversity GEF indicated that GEF does not directly support anything related to Ramsar.

Guangchun Lei responded about progressing issues related to synergies with other conventions and combined reporting, and Ramsar Secretariat is working on GEF-Ramsar- partnerships. On COP9 registration, Lei Guangchun also encouraged CPs to register as soon as possible after this regional meeting.

Indonesia made a recommendation on changes to text of DR10 – additional text proposed. Lei Guangchun responded that a DR on poverty and wetlands will be proposed to SC31.

Israel questioned what is the mechanism for putting forward the DRs? Lei responded that this meeting serves as introduction and consultation for the DRs, the view from this meeting will be presented at SC31, and this process is meant to help Parties to initiate their internal consultation on the DRs, to be contributed to the discussion at COP9.

Malaysia expressed concern about the wording of next agenda item, “adoption”, and indicated that it cannot adopt issues without the full documentation of DRs available. **The Chair (Iran)** responded that in that case, it will not be documented as adopted, but will be circulated for comments before being adopted. Mechanisms for adoption are still unclear and will be dealt with during the next session.

Iran (Chair) announced the establishment of the Ramsar Regional Centre for West Asia in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which mainly serves to build up capacity for wetland management and wise use in the region.

Agenda item 14, Adoption of regional issues for COP9 (Chaired by Iran and Ramsar Secretariat, 11: 00 – 12:00, 16 May)

Guangchun Lei briefly introduced the purpose of this session, which was to serve as a wrap-up on Asia regional issues that should be put forward to COP9, through SC31, by the Asian SC representatives. Then he presented seven issues (below) that had been discussed in the meeting, for the adoption by the meeting.

Responses from the meeting included:

Malaysia: Difficult to adopt the above and support point 3 especially since there was no documentation.

BirdLife International: Ambiguity in point 3. Support should be expressed only for proposals for new initiatives. Currently point 3 includes ongoing initiatives and new initiatives.

Japan: Will support the development of a DR to COP9 to support the promotion of AWS.

WWF: Comment on 4 where the 'or' should be replaced by an 'and'.

Pakistan, Malaysia and Cambodia – Proposed 'draft for adoption' instead of 'proposed for adoption'. But this was not accepted by the majority and it was emphasized that we should have a consensus on our regional issues before the end of this meeting. It was proposed to have a short break, to revise the regional issue wording.

After re-editing the text of the issues, the meeting adopted the following issue for COP9:

- 1) Support proposal related to AWS, consisting of:
 - Disseminate Chilika Statement to wider community for promotion of wetland conservation;
 - Continue AWS scheme in the future and link it with Ramsar regional activities;
 - Disseminate the effects of having a regional forum such as AWS to other regions at Ramsar COP9.
- 2) Welcome the invitation by the Republic of Korea to host COP10 in Korea as presented in the Asia Regional Meeting (Beijing, 13-16 May 2005) and this is supported by the meeting.
- 3) Support the development of subregional initiatives, including Himalayan Initiative and the Ramsar Center Iran for Central and West Asia; support the development of a transregional initiative -WSSD Type II Partnership for East Asia – Australasia Flyway Partnership; and welcome the future development of a regional initiative for the wise use of peatlands in Northeast Asia (Amur river) and Central Asia;
- 4) The SGF mechanism should be strengthened and a similar mechanism such as America (Wetlands for the Future/US) and Africa (Swiss grant for Africa) have should be established for the Asia region.
- 5) A regional meeting is an effective platform for communication and the development of the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Asia, and it should be continued in the future.
- 6) Support proposed COP9 Resolution (DR15) on wetlands and poverty reduction, with addition of reference to PRSPs, the fact that many of the world's poor live in or near wetlands and are dependent on them, and the risks of falling into poverty, as well as the existing poor.

- 7) Support a proposal for a COP9 Resolution (DR10) on natural disasters, with addition of reference to promotion of recovery from the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and measures for future mitigation and attention to vulnerability to such events.

Finally, delegates echoed their gratitude for the excellent organization of the Ramsar Asian Regional Meeting by the Government of China.

Concluding remarks and thanks

Indonesia, on behalf of three members of the SC who are representatives for Asia, congratulated the success of the regional meeting and promised to bring the outcomes of this meeting to the coming SC31 meeting.

China thanked the participants, Ramsar secretariat, and volunteers from the Chinese side. China committed itself to join forces with other countries in Asia to promote wetland conservation.

The Ramsar Secretariat thanked all Asian regional meeting participants and congratulated all for the success and innovative approaches to wetland conservation and management in Asia; thanked all the International Organization Partners (IOP) and other Asian organizations that have supported and contributed to this meeting; thanked the Chinese Government and other Chinese institutions, the volunteers, SC representatives, the rapporteurs and the interpreters.

The Meeting concluded at 12:40, 16 May 2005.