

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)  
52<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Standing Committee  
Gland, Switzerland, 13-17 June 2016

**SC52-03 Rev.1**

## **Development of a strategy outlining the potential phased integration of Arabic or other UN languages into the work of the Ramsar Convention**

**Action requested:**

Standing Committee is invited to advise on and approve the plan by the Secretariat to develop a strategy outlining the potential phased integration of Arabic or other UN languages into the work of the Convention.

1. At the 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Ramsar Convention, Resolution XII.3 was adopted, which noted the interest of Parties in accommodating the use of Arabic or other official UN languages into the operation of the Ramsar Convention so as to support its further development and implementation.
2. Resolution XII.3 went on to request that the Secretariat develop a strategy, subject to the availability of resources, outlining the potential phased integration of Arabic or other UN languages into the work of the Convention. The Resolution also requested that the Standing Committee monitor the progress of this work and advise as necessary.
3. Attached at Annex 1 is the Secretariat's proposed plan for developing such a strategy and Standing Committee members are kindly requested to provide comments on this document and adopt a final version at SC52.

## Annex 1

### Proposed plan by the Ramsar Secretariat to develop a strategy outlining the potential phased integration of Arabic or other UN languages into the work of the Convention

#### 1. Background

Currently, the “official” and “working” languages of the Ramsar Convention are English, French and Spanish. However, the Convention recognizes the importance of the work, communication materials and tools of the Convention being conducted and available in as many of the official languages of the United Nations as possible. The Convention has expressed this view through a number of documents, including:

- a. Recommendation 1.7 *A protocol on amendment procedures* [\[link\]](#) which called for the text of the Convention to be translated into the UN languages;
- b. Resolution 4.2 *Working languages of the Conference of the Contracting Parties* which decided that Spanish shall be a working language of the Conference of the Contracting Parties [\[link\]](#);
- c. Recommendation 5.15 *Working languages of the Conference of the Contracting Parties* [\[link\]](#) which called on the Convention Bureau to investigate the possibility of adopting Arabic as a working language of the Conference and also requested Arabic-speaking Parties and potential Parties to assist the Bureau in seeking the necessary funding support for the adoption of Arabic as a working language of the Conference;
- d. Resolution XI.1 *Institutional hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat* [\[link\]](#) that instructed the Standing Committee through an appropriate Working Group to develop a strategy to explore the accommodation of UN languages into the Convention;
- e. 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)* [\[link\]](#) which presented options and recommended a course of action to the Standing Committee Management Working Group on:
  - i. Ensuring that the plenary meetings of Conference of the Parties and Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention are delivered in the three official languages; and
  - ii. Means for delivering the Ramsar Convention in additional UN Languages.
- f. Decision SC47-07 [\[link\]](#) concerning accommodation of UN Languages under Resolution XI.1:
  - i. to address the longstanding differences in treatment of the three official Convention languages;
  - ii. to allocate resources from the current budget surplus to fund the costs of translating SC48 documents into French and Spanish;
  - iii. to instruct the Secretariat to include within all draft core budget scenarios for 2016–2018, prepared for Parties’ consideration at SC48, the costs of translating all SC documents into French and Spanish;

- iv. to continue considering translation of additional STRP documents into French and Spanish, based on inputs by the Secretariat and the STRP, with a view to reviewing this issue at SC48; and
- v. to request the Secretariat to prepare a draft text for a Resolution in response to Resolution XI.1 for the consideration of SC48, addressing accommodation of the Arabic Language into the Convention, supported by:
  - analysis of legal considerations in relation to the Convention text as well as COP Resolutions including the Rules of Procedure; and
  - options for a step-by-step introduction of Arabic into the work of the Convention, subject to the availability of resources.
- g. COP12 Document 17 *Legal Brief: Opinion on the accommodation of Arabic and other UN languages into the Ramsar Convention* [\[link\]](#) which addressed the accommodation of Arabic into the Convention, supported by:
  - analysis of legal considerations in relation to the Convention text and COP Resolutions; and
  - options for a step-by-step introduction of Arabic into the work of the Convention, subject to the availability of resources.
- h. Resolution XII.3 *Enhancing the languages of the Convention and its visibility and stature, and increasing synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions* [\[link\]](#) which requested that the Secretariat develop a strategy outlining the potential phased integration of Arabic or other UN languages into the work of the Convention.

This proposed plan has been prepared in response to Resolution XII.3, which calls for the Ramsar Secretariat to develop a strategy for the potential phased integration of Arabic or other UN languages into the work of the Convention as “official” and “working” languages.

The Secretariat will work with advice from an informal group of Contracting Parties representing a range of language groups.

## **2. Work to be undertaken**

- 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.

### 3. Timeline

Steps	Indicative time
<p>1. Prepare and conduct a structured questionnaire-based survey of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) the short, medium and long-term language need of Ramsar Parties;</li> <li>b) how other MEAs and relevant international organizations work to accommodate the use of the UN languages into their work; and</li> <li>c) barriers to effective translation, publishing and interpreting of the three official languages of the Convention.</li> </ul> <p>A list of those consulted will include all the Contracting Party national focal points, IOPs, representatives of other MEAs and relevant organizations, and Ramsar Secretariat staff as needed.</p> <p>Consultations will be done by a variety of cost effective methods, potentially including email and telephone interviews, and web-based tools such as Skype, SurveyMonkey and the listserves and web portals maintained by the Ramsar Secretariat.</p>	<p>June to September 2016</p>
<p>2. From the results of the survey and discussions, the Secretariat will propose a range of options for a gradual approach to include additional UN languages into the work of the Convention. Each of these options would outline the additional actions and resources needed for a step-by-step integration and financing of interpretation at meetings, the translation of meeting documents and as appropriate, of other key Ramsar documents. There also needs to be consideration of possible translation of the Ramsar website into the additional UN languages. The survey results will also be used to provide options for overcoming the barriers to the full and effective use of the three existing languages of the Convention.</p> <p>All of the options provided will include a budget and timeline for the phased integration of necessary procedural changes, key indicators, and milestones associated with that option. It will also require an analysis of the possible means of financing these additional actions.</p>	<p>October to November 2016</p>
<p>3. Prepare and submit a draft report to the informal group of Parties summarizing the result of the consultation process.</p>	<p>December 2016</p>
<p>4. From the comments by the informal groups of Parties, prepare a first draft of the Strategy for consideration by the informal group of Parties.</p>	<p>January to February 2017</p>
<p>5. On the basis of further comment from the informal group of Parties, prepare a second draft of the Strategy for submission to SC53.</p>	<p>March 2017</p>
<p>6. Presentation of the revised draft of the Strategy at SC53.</p>	<p>June 2017</p>
<p>7. From the comments received at SC53, develop the final draft of the Strategy.</p>	<p>July 2017</p>

#### **4. Deliverables**

- a. Reports from the consultation survey and meetings with the various stakeholder groups;
- b. Detailed draft of Strategy for the potential phased integration of UN languages into the work of the Convention including details of the present cost of translation and interpretation into English, French and Spanish, and the proportional amount used from Contracting Parties' annual contribution to cover such costs.