

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

53rd Meeting of the Standing Committee

Gland, Switzerland, 29 May – 2 June 2017

SC53-19

Options for holding future meetings of the Standing Committee in Geneva

Actions requested:

Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. consider the contents of this document;
- ii. consider the need for and cost of coffee breaks and a reception at each meeting of the Standing Committee paid from the core budget; and
- iii. decide on the venue for future meetings of the Committee.

Background

1. At its 52nd meeting (2016), the Standing Committee adopted Decision SC52-25 as follows: “The Standing Committee asked the Secretariat to work with any interested Parties to prepare a paper for SC53 discussing the possibility of holding future meetings of the Committee in Geneva and requested the issue to be included in the next agenda of SC53.”
2. The Secretariat has accordingly examined the difference in costs between holding a meeting of the Standing Committee in Gland and in Geneva, focusing primarily on the costs to the core budget.

Core-budget cost comparison

3. Meetings of the Standing Committee are currently held at the Headquarters of IUCN in Gland, Switzerland, which hosts the Ramsar Secretariat and provides administrative support at a cost to the core budget of Ramsar. The main meeting room at IUCN Headquarters has a maximum capacity of 120 meeting participants. In past Standing Committee meetings, there has been an average of 100 delegates attending the plenary sessions and about 85 delegates attending the meetings of working groups and sub-groups.
4. The most appropriate place to hold a meeting of the Standing Committee in Geneva is the International Conference Centre of Geneva (CICG). It is located close to the United Nations headquarters and a short tram ride to the train station and the city centre. The CICG is used for many meetings of the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations, and for meetings of bodies of other international conventions. It is owned by a foundation established by the Swiss Confederation and the Cantonal State of Geneva. For this reason, the use of meeting rooms by intergovernmental organizations is provided free of charge.

5. However, there are costs associated with the use of the meeting rooms at CIGG and with the other logistical aspects of each meeting. These are shown in Table 1, which presents the estimated difference between the costs for a meeting at IUCN Headquarters, Gland, and a meeting at CIGG, Geneva. The costs are based on a meeting of five days, at actual costs in Gland (SC48 and SC52), and for 130 participants in CIGG (110 delegates and 20 staff).

Table 1: Estimated comparison of costs for holding a Standing Committee meeting in Gland or in the CIGG in Geneva

Items	Costs in Gland (CHF)	Costs at CIGG (CHF)	Cost Difference	Notes
Meeting rooms	-	-	-	At CIGG, the Ramsar Secretariat does not pay to rent meeting rooms. All equipment and services are additional costs. Meeting rooms have a standard set-up, which can be changed at a cost (varies with the rooms and set-up).
Offices	-	-	-	Office space at CIGG is free, with desk and phone. Other equipment at a cost (see below).
Microphones/ sound (operator)	9,120	4,460	-4,660	At CIGG, microphones and headsets are included with the room. The cost shown is for the operators for the plenary room. There will be an additional operator cost if microphones are used in other rooms.
Projection (beamer) plenary	-	1,305	1,305	The cost shown for CIGG is for the beamer in the plenary room only.
Projection (beamer) / 4 breakout rooms	-	1,972	1,972	If a beamer is needed in breakout rooms at CIGG, cost is CHF 170/day/room, or CHF 493/week/room. Estimate of four breakout rooms for Regional Meetings.
Projection (laptop) / 2 plenary and 4 breakout rooms	-	2,586	2,586	If laptops are needed in the breakout rooms at CIGG, cost will be CHF 431/week/room.
Interpreters	-	-	-	No difference in cost.
Sponsored participants' flights	-	-	-	No difference in cost.
Sponsored participants' hotel and DSA	4,840	6,460	1,620	Estimate of 20 sponsored delegates. Using IUCN DSA rate for Geneva of CHF 323 and DSA rate for Gland/Nyon of CHF 242.
Coffee breaks	3,770	9,100	5,330	Based on coffee & tea available during morning and afternoon for 100 people for 5 days.
Reception	2,540	5,000	2,460	Based on SC52 costs.
WiFi	-	1,040	1,040	WiFi at CIGG is free in the meeting rooms (25mb), but has to be added for the offices. This price is based on 13 offices x CHF 80.
Photocopies	600	1,250	650	CHF 0.25 per copy at CIGG with an estimate of 5,000 copies, vs CHF 0.12 per copy at IUCN.
Staff travel	-	3,910	3,910	Geneva: 23 staff at CHF 34 per day, 5 days (including parking).
Total	20,870	37,083	16,213	

6. On the basis of this calculation, the additional cost to the core budget of the Ramsar Secretariat of holding meetings in Geneva instead of in Gland is roughly CHF 16,200 per meeting. However this includes several assumptions:
 - a. Regarding hotels and daily subsistence allowance (DSA) for sponsored delegates, the basis for calculations in the table is the DSA rate of IUCN for Geneva which specifies a standard rate of CHF 323. It has been practice to offer sponsored delegates staying in Nyon a DSA rate of CHF 242. These rates cover the cost of accommodation and subsistence. Hotel rates close to CIGG vary, depending on the period of the year, between CHF 150 and CHF 300 and more (2-Star to 4-Star hotels). Special prices (between CHF 90 and CHF 165) and deals have been negotiated with hotels in Nyon which enables the Secretariat to make block-bookings without the need to provide any financial guarantee until 15 days before the start of the meeting.
 - b. Regarding coffee breaks, the cost of providing refreshments at CIGG is significantly higher than at IUCN Headquarters, with the difference accounting for one third of the additional cost in Geneva. However, it is worth noting that, at meetings of many other bodies, there are no coffee breaks during the meetings at CIGG (for example at meetings of the Basel, Stockholm and Rotterdam Conventions and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). Water is made available free of charge in the meeting rooms and participants who wish to buy coffee can do so. For meetings in Geneva, the Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention could adopt the same practice and save more than CHF 9,000 from the core-budget cost of that option.
 - c. Regarding the reception, the cost would again be much higher at CIGG than at IUCN Headquarters, accounting for around 15% of the higher cost. It is worth noting that many organizations do not arrange receptions at their meetings, being conscious of the possible view that the many Parties that are not able to participate should not be obliged to support (through the core budget) a cocktail for the few who are participating. In some cases, permanent missions of countries that are participating in intergovernmental meetings in Geneva host a reception at CIGG or at the Palais des Nations (UN headquarters in Geneva) during the meeting. If the Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention adopted the same practice for meetings in Geneva, it would save CHF 5,000 from the core-budget cost of that option.
7. The total cost of a meeting without coffee or a reception provided from the core budget would be approximately CHF 8,400 higher at CIGG than at IUCN Headquarters.

Non-core-budget considerations

8. When considering the best location for its meetings, the Standing Committee may also wish to take into account the costs for participants who are not sponsored, and also some non-financial factors.
9. With regard to financial issues, the main costs for non-sponsored participants relate to travel and accommodation within Switzerland:
 - a. Regarding travel: For people who arrive at Geneva Airport or those who are based at the permanent missions in Geneva, there is a minor cost per person for travel (by train or car) when meetings are held in Gland.

- b. Regarding accommodation: As indicated above, the general cost of hotels is higher in Geneva than in the Gland/Nyon area. There is a range of restaurants in both locations, and a greater variety in Geneva.
10. With regard to the non-financial considerations:
- a. Geneva is of course closer to the airport for those arriving from outside Switzerland:
 - Geneva Airport – CICG: 20 minutes
 - Geneva Airport – IUCN Headquarters in Gland: 45 minutes
 - b. The proximity of the two venues to the local town centres is similar:
 - Cornavin (Geneva main station) – CICG: 11 minutes
 - Nyon – IUCN Headquarters: 13 minutes
 - c. If the SC meeting is in Geneva, delegates are likely to take public transport to CIGG. Geneva Public Transport's (TPG) service is good although very crowded at rush hours.
 - d. For participants from permanent missions in Geneva, the travel to CIGG is much more convenient than to IUCN Headquarters.
 - e. For participants who wish to visit the permanent mission of their own country, the United Nations or other international organizations in Geneva, their proximity in Geneva is an obvious advantage.
 - f. To ensure meeting space at CIGG, the date of the meeting needs to be reserved well in advance. For example, regarding the 54th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC54) planned for April 2018, only the week of 16 April was still available at the time of writing. Holding the meeting in IUCN Headquarters gives more flexibility to find suitable dates.
 - g. For the Secretariat, holding a meeting in Geneva would imply additional logistical arrangements, to ensure that all necessary documents and equipments were available.

Conclusion

11. The Standing Committee is invited to consider the information presented above in deciding on the venue for its future meetings and the implications for the core budget.