

Language strategy

Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to review the text for inclusion in a draft resolution in Annex 1 to the present document and make recommendations for its presentation at the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Introduction

1. At its 12th meeting (Punta del Este, 2015), the Conference of Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands adopted Resolution XII.3, including a section on accommodation of UN languages, as follows:
 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;*
 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.*
2. At its 52nd meeting (SC52, in 2016), the 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. At the 53rd meeting of the Standing Committee (SC53, in 2017), the Secretariat presented document SC53-06 summarizing the results of consultations on this issue, outlining points to be taken into account in the development of a strategy and draft resolution and seeking guidance from the Committee. Following discussion, and consideration in a working group, the Committee adopted Decision SC53-06 as follows:

The Standing Committee decided that the matters dealt with in document SC53-06 Preparation of a Language Strategy for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands should be taken forward intersessionally by the Secretariat in consultation with the open-ended informal working group established by SC52. The working group was asked to report to SC54 on the outcomes of its further deliberations, including any proposals that might be taken forward to COP13, subject to approval at SC54.
 4. In accordance with that Decision, the Secretariat continued to consult with the working group intersessionally. Members of the working group provided helpful comments, but there remained a diversity of views on some issues.
 5. Following the consultations, the Secretariat has prepared a text for a draft resolution to be submitted by the Standing Committee, based on the following principles:
 - a) priority should be given to ensuring that the current official languages are treated equally to the fullest extent possible within available resources;

- b) the Conference of the Parties has instructed the Secretariat to prepare a draft resolution that includes the step-by-step introduction of Arabic into the work of the Convention subject to the availability of resources;
 - c) the main barrier to the full provision of the current official languages of the Convention and to the accommodation of new languages is the lack of funding allocated for this purpose in the budget established by the Conference of the Parties;
 - d) the provision of essential language services should be funded from the core budget; these services include translation and interpretation for plenary meetings of the Conference of the Parties and the Standing Committee;
6. The draft text for a resolution presented in Annex 1 is based on these principles and takes into account the background information contained in document SC53-06, presented and discussed at the 53rd meeting of the Standing Committee. It is presented as an addendum to the proposed draft resolution on *Enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions* which is annexed to document SC54-14 (https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/sc54-14_enhancing_visibility_synergies_e.pdf) but it could be adapted for presentation as a separate resolution if appropriate. It should be noted that the Annex to the draft resolution implies increases in the core budget which are not included in the budget documents provided for the present meeting.

Annex 1

Proposed addendum to Draft Resolution XIII.xx on *Enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions* (Document SC54-14)

Submitted by the Standing Committee

Financial implications of implementation

Paragraph (number and key part of text)	Action	Cost (CHF)

A:

It is proposed that the following text be included in the preamble of the draft resolution.

1. RECALLING that, in Resolution XI.1, adopted at its 11th meeting (Bucharest, 2012), the Conference of the Parties instructed the Standing Committee, with the participation of all interested Parties, to develop strategies that explore the accommodation of UN languages into the Convention, the elevation of the Convention's visibility and stature, including *inter alia* through enhancing high-level political engagement in its work at national, regional, and global levels, the enhancement of synergies with multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and other international entities including through regional initiatives, and the increased involvement in the initiatives of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP);
2. RECALLING ALSO that, in Resolution XII.3, adopted at the 12th meeting (Punta del Este, 2015) the Conference of the Parties called on the Secretariat to develop a strategy and draft resolution addressing accommodation of the Arabic Language into the Convention and further phased integration of existing Convention languages, which called on the Standing Committee to submit its recommendations to the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties;
3. ACKNOWLEDGING that funding constraints have precluded the provision of a full and equal language service for the official languages of the Convention, English, French and Spanish;
4. CONSIDERING that the accommodation of additional languages, in particular Arabic, into the daily work of the Convention, could foster the engagement of more Contracting Parties to the Convention and could assist Contracting Parties to raise awareness and improve their implementation of the Convention;

5. NOTING the expressed interest in accession to the Ramsar Convention by a growing number of Arabic-speaking countries and the increasing interest in implementation of the Convention by Arabic-speaking Contracting Parties;
6. APPRECIATING the range of distinct wetland types such as wadis, sabkhas and oases in Arabic-speaking countries and their under-representation among Ramsar Sites in the network, and the presence of organizations and individuals in the region with expertise in the conservation and wise use of wetlands, whose contribution would be beneficial to the further implementation of the Convention;
7. UNDERSTANDING the range of pressing wetland issues in Arabic-speaking and other countries, in light of the increasing demand from the region's growing population and changes in water availability due to changing rainfall, unsustainable use patterns, and climate changes;
8. APPRECIATING the work of the Standing Committee and its working group on language strategy for their work in relation to the development of a language strategy for the Convention;

B:

It is proposed that the following text be included in the operative part of the draft resolution, together with Annex 1 to which it refers.

It should be noted that the second and third paragraphs are the existing paragraphs 30 and 31. The paragraphs proposed to be replaced establish the process that led to the preparation of the present document.

Concerning a language strategy for the Convention

26. ADOPTS the Language strategy for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands presented in Annex 1;
27. 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;
28. 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 at COP14, and REQUESTS Parties to provide such documents to the Secretariat;

Proposed Annex 1 to Draft Resolution XIII.xx on *Enhancing the Convention’s visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions*

Language strategy for
the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

Basic principle

The Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands acknowledges that the use of multiple languages in the work of the Convention, the governing and subsidiary bodies and the Secretariat could: help to improve the implementation of the Convention by Parties; make the Convention more accessible to a wider public; and foster the interest and engagement of non-party States. However, as for some other conventions, budgetary constraints have precluded the provision of a language service in all six official languages of the United Nations.

The Conference of the Contracting Parties agrees that the key goals for a language strategy are:

- a) an equal language service for English, French and Spanish, being the official languages of the Convention at the start of the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties;
- b) if possible, introduction of Arabic as an official language.

When seeking to fill vacancies in the Secretariat, the Secretary General should take into account the language skills of applicants, with a view to augmenting the capacity of the Secretariat to communicate in all official languages.

The cost of translation of non-official documentation that results from projects or from externally funded activities should also be provided from external funds unless the Conference of the Parties or the Standing Committee specify otherwise.

Timetable

13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The budget adopted for 2019-2021 includes provision for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a full equal language service in English French and Spanish for meetings of governing and subsidiary bodies (interpretation of plenary sessions, and translation of working documents); - new official documentation in English, French and Spanish; and - equal treatment of these official languages on the website to the extent that resources allow. - Arabic is approved in principle as an official language of the Convention, with language services to be provided from 2022 subject to available resources.
2019-2020	- Secretariat arranges translation into Arabic of the text of the Convention and key Resolutions of the Conference of the Parties, subject to external funding.
14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (2021)	- Subject to agreement at COP14, the budget adopted for 2022-2024 includes provision for a full language service for meetings of governing and subsidiary bodies and new official documentation in English, French and Spanish, and for the Conference of the Parties in Arabic.
2022-2023	- Secretariat arranges translation into Arabic of remaining Resolutions that remain in effect and key high-level pages of the Ramsar website, subject to external funding.

15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (2024)	<p>- Subject to agreement at COP15, the budget adopted for 2025-2027 includes provision for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a full language service for meetings of governing and subsidiary bodies in English, French and Spanish; - a full language service for meeting of governing bodies in Arabic; and - all new official documentation in the four official languages; - additional staff capacity for management of texts and documentation in Arabic.
2025-2026	<p>- Secretariat arranges translation into Arabic of new official notifications (e.g. Ramsar Exchange messages), related news stories and new STRP publications, subject to external funding.</p>
16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (2027)	<p>- Subject to agreement at COP16, the budget adopted for 2028-2031 includes provision for a full language service for meetings of governing and subsidiary bodies in Arabic, English, French and Spanish, and for all new official documentation, and for new website pages.</p>