

Observer status in the United Nations General Assembly

Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to consider the present document and to decide on the appropriate way forward to ensure that in the long term Ramsar Convention Secretariat can represent the Convention in relevant United Nations events and, in the short term, can participate in the High Level Political Forum discussions on SDG 6 and SDG 15.

Background

1. On 1 August 2017, the Chair of the Standing Committee wrote to the members of the Committee, proposing to ask the President of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to include in the agenda for its 72nd session, starting on 12 September, a request for observer status for the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. He noted that having this accreditation would be particularly important for the 2018 meeting of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF), which reviews the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and whose focus in 2018 will include SDG 6 on water and SDG 15 on biodiversity and life on land.
2. Four members of the Committee expressed their support. Some were concerned about the short time available for consultation but there were no objections.
3. Therefore, on 11 August, Uruguay, as Chair of the Standing Committee, submitted to the President of the UNGA the above-mentioned request to include an item in the agenda for the 72nd session of the General Assembly. The submission included an explanatory memorandum addressing the criteria and legal issues¹. The proposal was subsequently co-sponsored by Colombia.
4. The request to grant observer status to the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands was considered by the General Committee of the UNGA on 13 September. The inclusion of this item in the agenda was approved and referred to the Sixth Committee for consideration on 9 October. By that time, at least 25 Contracting Parties had expressed support; most of them by signing the proposal in New York and a few by communicating their support directly to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat.

¹ See <http://undocs.org/en/A/72/194>

5. However, during the discussions, it became clear that there was no possibility to reach consensus on this matter during the 72nd session of the UNGA. Consequently, Uruguay requested the deferral of its consideration to the 73rd session, to take place in 2018.
6. The Chair wrote to all members of the Standing Committee on 13 December 2017, to inform them of these developments. He thanked all Parties that had endorsed the proposal. He noted that significant progress had been made, as the presentation of this item in the UNGA made States aware that the absence of the Ramsar Convention from relevant discussions under the auspices of the United Nations hinders its relevance and impact. The Chair also looked forward to discussions of this issue at the present meeting to achieve a solution that is agreeable to all Parties.

Recommendation

7. The Secretariat invites the Standing Committee to consider the appropriate action to take to enable the participation of the Ramsar Secretariat in United Nations events that are of interest to the Convention, including, in the short term, the 2018 UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF), which will include a focus on SDG 6 on water, and SDG 15, regarding biodiversity and life on land.