

Report of the Secretary General

Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to note the report of the Secretary General.

1. This report covers the work of the Secretariat from the closing of the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP13) on 29 October 2018, through 15 April 2019. It provides both an overview and selected highlights of the work completed during this period.
2. COP13 was an important moment for the Convention. It provided a key milestone by which the work of the previous two years to strengthen the Secretariat to fulfil its core mandate could be assessed. The Contracting Parties expressed satisfaction with the work of the Secretariat, defined priorities for the new triennium and took decisions renewing their commitment to ensure that wetlands and the Convention are relevant to the sustainable development agenda. According to the International Institute for Sustainable Development, notable accomplishments achieved at COP13 included: the release of the *Global Wetland Outlook*; strengthening of links between wetlands and climate change; and strengthening of the links between wetlands and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
3. The Secretariat continues its commitment to strengthen its work to effectively deliver on its mandate specified in Article 8 of the Convention, to implement the instructions given to it by the Conference of the Contracting Parties and the Standing Committee, and to support Parties to implement the Strategic Plan of the Convention. Importantly, the Secretariat is taking assigned actions on Resolutions adopted by COP13 as the basis of its work plan. The main areas of work during the reporting period are described below, and documents prepared for the present meeting (SC57) provide further detail on various areas of the Secretariat's work.

Strengthening service to Contracting Parties' decision-making and accountability

4. The delivery of the Secretariat's core role of servicing Contracting Parties remains a priority, and includes the organization of meetings of governing and subsidiary bodies and accountability in all the work of the Secretariat to implement decisions and requests from the Contracting Parties. This area of work has been prioritized in the new triennial work plan and 2019 annual work plan, which is also presented to SC57 for its consideration (document SC57 Doc.16). The work plan explicitly refers to the requests made by Contracting Parties to the Secretariat to enhance accountability of the Secretariat.
5. A critical function of the Secretariat is the organization of meetings of governing and subsidiary bodies of the Convention, including the COP, Standing Committee and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP). During this period, the Secretariat has made logistical

arrangements, prepared meeting documents, and organized the convening of COP13, SC55 and SC56 in the past triennium, as well as STRP22 and SC57 in the current triennium.

6. A major highlight was the organization of COP13 as reported in document SC57 Doc.21.1, and early preparations for COP14:
 - The Secretariat has carried out an internal assessment of the organization of COP13 and has identified key lessons. These lessons and best practices have been incorporated into a new manual that provides guidance on planning and preparing for future meetings of the COP. Standard operating procedures are being developed as part of this guidance.
 - Based on the experience of COP13 the Secretariat has reviewed and updated its standard host country agreement to better reflect the requirements and needs of Parties at a meeting of the COP. This was done taking into account the equivalent agreements used by secretariats of other Conventions and internal feedback. Logistical changes of importance as well as steps to strive towards a more environmentally friendly and paperless meeting were developed. It should be noted that the financial burden placed on host countries of Ramsar meetings is generally greater than for other Conventions because the budget agreed by the COP includes no funds for its meetings.
 - A call for expressions of interest to host COP14 was sent to Parties on 19 November 2018 and again on 8 March 2019, reflecting the extended deadline of 24 May 2019 established by COP13. In response to these calls for expressions of interest, several countries have asked for additional information. A formal proposal has not been received at the date of writing this report.
7. The Secretariat has undertaken preparations for SC57, including logistical arrangements and preparation of meeting documents. It has supported the establishment of Standing Committee working groups and delivery on their mandates. The Secretariat is supporting the Strategic Plan Working Group in implementing the activities identified by COP13 to conduct the mid-term review of the Strategic Plan and the Effectiveness Working Group in hiring a consultant to undertake a review of the governance of the Convention. Together with the Legal Advisor it has assisted the Executive Team in the development of its proposed terms of reference.
8. The Secretariat has been active in supporting the establishment of the new STRP for the period 2019 – 2021.
 - A call for nominations was made on 20 November 2018. In response, the Secretariat received a total of 51 nominations, of which 44 were received within the deadline. Nominations included:
 - Nine for regional technical experts, 15 for technical experts and 20 for scientific experts. Several candidates were nominated in more than one category.
 - Regarding regional balance, the Secretariat received the following nominations within the deadline: eight from Africa; seven from Asia; ten from Europe; six from Latin America and the Caribbean; three from North America; and one from Oceania.
 - Regarding gender, nine of the candidates were women and 26 were men. The Secretariat would like to recommend that Contracting Parties more actively propose women for leadership roles within the Convention, in accordance with Resolution XIII.18 on *Gender and wetlands*.

- In accordance with Resolution XII.5 on *New framework for delivery of scientific and technical advice and guidance on the Convention*, the Secretariat submitted its recommendations for appointment of STRP members for consideration by the Management Working Group. The Resolution calls for the outgoing STRP Chair and Vice-Chair and the Secretariat to make recommendations as to members to be considered for reappointment. The Management Working Group first selected the Chair and Vice-Chair (Mr David Stroud and Dr Lisa-Maria Rebelo, respectively) who participated in the selection of other members. As required by Resolution XII.5, the Management Working Group automatically accepted the six proposed regional technical experts. At the same time, the Management Working Group selected six technical experts and six scientific experts.
 - In addition to supporting the establishment of the STRP, the Secretariat organized its 22nd meeting from 18 to 22 March. The meeting focused on the preparation of the STRP workplan to be submitted to SC57 for approval. Despite the short notice due to the tight timeline between the establishment of the Panel's membership and SC57, the meeting was attended by 28 participants.
 - The Secretariat supported the delivery of high-priority STRP tasks and completed tasks within the STRP 2016-2018 work plan, including translation of Ramsar Briefing Note 10: *Wetland restoration for climate change resilience* and Ramsar Technical Report 10: *The use of Earth Observation for wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring*. The Secretariat continues to promote the dissemination and use of the *Global Wetland Outlook: State of the World's Wetlands and their Services to People*.
 - The Secretariat will be working closely with the new STRP to ensure that its products are developed in a manner that serve the needs of the Parties, with particular attention to ensuring that the content, language and design of products is right for the intended audience. Additionally, the Secretariat will seek to identify ways to streamline the production of STRP outputs, enhance their distribution and utilization, and minimize costs.
9. The Secretariat is supporting the nomination process for the new CEPA Oversight Panel. Resolutions and decisions that refer to the CEPA Oversight Panel structure have been reviewed and the Secretariat has prepared a proposal for the Oversight Panel composition and nomination process that it believes will streamline the process and enhance the functionality of the Panel to fulfil its mandate. Intersessional approval by the Standing Committee has been requested.
10. The Secretariat continues to support requests from Contracting Parties to enhance the efficiency of processes of governing and implementation including:
- As instructed in Resolution XIII.4 on *Responsibilities roles and composition of the Standing Committee and regional categorization of countries under the Convention*, the Secretariat has prepared a document to provide a basis for a review of all Resolutions and decisions. That document is provided for consideration at the present meeting as document SC57 Doc.14.
 - The Secretariat has taken action on Resolution XIII.6 on *Language strategy for the Convention* and, via the Ramsar Exchange, encouraged all Parties to provide translations of the most important Ramsar information documents into their own official languages and to make them publicly available on their national Ramsar websites. Additionally, the Secretariat has invited Parties to provide translated Ramsar documents of wider relevance,

so that the Secretariat can make them available on the Convention's website. Currently there are 168 documents in languages other than English, French and Spanish on the Convention website.

11. The Secretariat has made efforts to enhance its performance in strengthening services to support Contracting Parties' decision-making and accountability. Additional capabilities and experience were strengthened in the Secretariat team in the last triennium. The support provided for all meetings of the governing and subsidiary bodies of the Convention has been standardized including overall planning, logistics and documentation. In addition, a whole-of-Secretariat approach has been used to fulfil this function with allocation of roles and responsibilities to each staff member during the meetings of these bodies. The Secretariat worked in a coordinated manner during COP13 and has consistently provided the required support to Contracting Parties' decision-making and accountability. However, the effective delivery of this core function is challenged by various factors that the Secretariat has brought to the attention of the Standing Committee and Management Working Group:
 - The main issues raised before COP13 were the inconsistency in the deadlines for submission of draft resolutions and other documents for meetings of the Standing Committee, and the number of meetings that were organized in 2018 and expectations of discussion of draft resolutions in various groups before COP.
 - The Secretariat would like to also highlight the complexity of the process to establish the STRP and the short timeline for this process to take place, for the new Panel to meet and for the consultation of the draft STRP workplan before its submission to the Standing Committee. Challenges have also been faced regarding the CEPA Oversight Panel, given the lack of clear guidance. More broadly, the Secretariat suggests that nominations for all subsidiary bodies take place before each COP so that Contracting Parties can take a decision on their Chairs and membership during the COP.

Increasing relevance of wetlands and the Convention to global sustainable development policy objectives

12. The Secretariat continues to strengthen its work in supporting international cooperation and enhancing the relevance of wetlands and the Convention in the global policy agenda. Given that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change are driving national and international planning and funding efforts, increased attention has been given to ensure that wetlands and the work of Contracting Parties under the Convention contribute to these policy frameworks.
13. The Secretariat continues to be actively engaged in discussions regarding achievement of the SDGs, as co-custodian of SDG Indicator 6.6.1 (on change in extent of water-related ecosystems), as requested in Decision SC53-17. It participated in the eighth meeting of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), which took place from 5 to 8 November 2018. At this meeting, Indicator 6.6.1 was upgraded to Tier I, based on the review of data availability in the global SDG Indicator database.
14. The Secretariat has been active in supporting the achievement of SDG 14 ("Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development"). The Secretary General and the Director General of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), as focal points for the SDG 14 Community of Ocean Action on Mangroves, invited Parties and delegates at Ramsar COP13 to attend a special side event on "UN Ocean

Conference Community of Ocean Action on Mangroves: Progress and Opportunities”. Ambassador Peter Thomson, UN Special Envoy for the Oceans, highlighted the critical role of mangrove ecosystems for coastal and ocean resilience and described the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands as the heartland to support actions for the Community of Ocean Action on Mangroves on mangrove conservation. Several Contracting Parties reported on their commitments. Ambassador Thomson encouraged the submission of new voluntary commitments, and urged countries and other stakeholders to update existing ones.

15. The Secretariat has been active in supporting the achievement of SDG 15 (“Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss”) and the biodiversity agenda. The Secretariat continues to strengthen its engagement with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). In 2018, the Secretariat participated actively in CBD COP14, in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt (13-29 November), raising the visibility of the Ramsar Convention in the High-Level Segment of the African Ministerial Summit on Biodiversity and in roundtables on Infrastructure and on Energy and Mining. The Secretary General participated as a panellist in the session of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and Vision to 2050, and delivered a statement on behalf of the eight biodiversity-related Conventions.
16. Resolution XIII.8, on *Future implementation of scientific and technical aspects of the Convention for 2019-2021*, calls for developing thematic requests to the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) for its future work programmes. In line with the procedure set forth in the Guidelines at Annex 4 of Resolution XIII.8, the Secretariat issued a call for proposals to Contracting Parties, International Organization Partners (IOPs), Ramsar Regional Initiatives, the STRP and multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) on 9 November 2018. The Secretariat received three proposals in response to the call. It forwarded the proposals to the STRP for review and comment in accordance with the Guidelines. The STRP’s feedback, along with the proposals, was then sent to the Standing Committee for their consideration and endorsement. The proposal for *Thematic Assessment on Peatlands* was endorsed by the Standing Committee and the Secretariat submitted that proposal to IPBES.
17. The Secretariat continues to participate actively in the Biodiversity Liaison Group (BLG), in particular through the Deputy Secretary General’s attendance at the 13th ordinary meeting of the BLG (18-19 September 2018), in which a major focus was the engagement in the process for the development of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.
18. The Secretariat renewed its Memorandum of Cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). This Memorandum reaffirms and formalizes the ongoing partnership between the Secretariat and UNEP regarding specified activities relating to conservation and wise use of wetlands.
19. Given the critical role played by wetlands in climate change mitigation and adaptation, the Secretariat has engaged in the climate change policy agenda. In particular, the Secretariat participated in COP24 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), held in Katowice, Poland, in December 2018 including as a panellist in the following events:
 - “Protecting Tropical Peatlands Together – a Triple win for the Climate, People and the Planet”: the Secretariat and other partners in the Global Peatlands Initiative highlighted the importance of peatlands as a key and often overlooked ecosystem for climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services; and

- Innovative climate-smart management and South-South cooperation at a global scale. The panel shared experiences regarding progress in collaborative efforts across sectors to tackle the challenge of peatland protection and restoration.

The Secretariat is identifying opportunities for further engagement prior to and at UNFCCC COP25, in Chile in 2020, on the basis of COP13 resolutions related to climate change.

20. The Secretary General engaged actively in the High Level Segment of the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, in Nairobi, Kenya (11-15 March 2019), emphasizing the role of wetlands in sustainable production and their contribution to achievement of the SDGs.
21. The Secretariat participated in the second Arctic Biodiversity Congress, hosted by Finland, and in the Arctic Council's working group on the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF). Reference was made to the Nordic Council policy on peatlands and climate in a Ramsar context (elaborated by the Ramsar Regional Initiative NorBalWet), as well as the current Arctic wetland project by CAFF and Ramsar Resolution XIII.23 on *Wetlands in the Arctic and Sub-Arctic*.
22. At the invitation of Austria as President of the European Union, the Secretary General contributed to the deliberations of the EU's Water Directors' meeting, stressing the links between wetlands and water management, notably for flood risk mitigation, water quality improvement, agriculture and biodiversity, in the context of the ongoing work on the EU Water Directive.
23. During the reporting period, the Secretariat actively sought to strengthen its relationship with the Geneva-based Permanent Missions to the United Nations and UN agencies. On 31 January 2019, the Secretariat hosted a World Wetlands Day event for the Permanent Missions, UN agencies and Geneva-based NGOs, on "Wetlands as a natural solution for reducing carbon emissions".
24. Other meetings in which the Secretariat participated were:
 - Partnership for Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction (PEDRR) Seminar, 4 December 2018, Geneva;
 - PEDRR: the International Science-Policy Workshop, 12-14 February 2019, Bonn, Germany; and
 - East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership 10th Meeting of Partners (MOP10), 10-14 December 2018, Changjiang, China.
25. In fulfilment of its mandate, the Ramsar Secretariat has enhanced its engagement with relevant MEAs and UN processes. However, a major challenge remains the fact that the Secretariat does not have observer status in the UN General Assembly, nor in the UN Economic and Social Council, which is the UN platform for debate on sustainable development. At SC54, in Decision SC54-07, the Standing Committee "instructed the Secretariat, in conjunction with interested Parties, to continue exploring options for gaining access to meetings of the United Nations General Assembly and related high-level fora". Decision SC55-12 instructs the Secretariat with support from an informal group of interested Contracting Parties to bring forward a structured proposal for consideration at SC57. Accordingly, the Secretariat requested Contracting Parties to express their interest in being members of the informal group to implement the decision from SC55. The Secretariat has also encountered limitations to its engagement in the UN water agenda, which is coordinated across the UN system by UN-Water. Unlike other MEAs, the Ramsar Convention is not a "member" of UN-Water, as it is not part of the UN system. The Secretariat can only contribute as a "partner", which implies limitations to its engagement.

Strengthening support and enabling implementation

26. During the reporting period, the Secretariat provided support in the designation of ten Ramsar Sites and the update of information for seven existing Sites. This included support in transfer of data into the new Ramsar Sites Information System (RSIS), and publication and translation of Site summaries.
27. The Secretariat carried out a Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM) to Grand Bassam Ramsar Site, Côte d'Ivoire, from 23 to 30 November 2018.
28. The Secretariat has continued its efforts to strengthen its "enabling" role, to use its limited capacity and resources in a more efficient and strategic way. Regarding capacity building, the Secretariat has engaged in numerous capacity-building efforts including training sessions and workshops. In looking at enhancing effectiveness and reach, the Secretariat introduced internet-based approaches and in particular the use of webinars. During the reporting period four sessions were organized to provide training on the use of the RSIS, with 65 attendees from 41 Contracting Parties. Results from a satisfaction survey of participants indicates that all the participants found the webinars on the RSIS useful, scoring an average of 4.26 out of 5. Among suggestions received were: to make the webinars more interactive; to organize webinars covering specific parts of the RSIS, using real-life examples; and to organize training on the functioning of negotiations during COPs, on how Convention bodies work and on Ramsar Site management and wise use. More regular training sessions were requested. Efforts are underway to put in place a more effective and coordinated whole-of-Secretariat approach to capacity building including the use of this type of cost-effective approach.
29. The Secretariat is in the process of renewing its partnership with Danone. This partnership extension will provide resources for activities to increase visibility and awareness of wetlands and the Convention. The partnership will support Danone in developing validated sustainable watershed management and climate change tools and methodologies. Following a change in Danone's priorities, the Secretariat needs to raise additional funds for World Wetlands Day celebrations and for the Ramsar Awards programme. The Danone partnership continues to open doors to new opportunities such as potential collaboration with the Livelihoods Fund and the CEO Water Mandate.
30. The Secretariat continues strengthened collaboration with its International Organization Partners. A meeting to review implementation of the Joint Activities for Collaboration in the renewed Memorandum of Cooperation was held on the margins of Ramsar COP13. During this meeting, a number of joint communications activities were agreed to including the issuance of a joint statement, production of World Wetlands Day materials and dissemination of the *Global Wetland Outlook*. New areas of collaboration include IOPs featuring the Convention more prominently in their visibility and engagement campaigns, joint outreach to the private sector, and shared post-2020 messaging. A follow-up teleconference was held on 8 March 2019 to review progress and discuss future plans.
31. The Resource Mobilization Work Plan has been updated to reflect the new non-core funding priorities identified in Annex 3 of Resolution XIII.2 on *Financial and budgetary matters*. During the period of this report, the database of potential funders has been completed and funding proposals/templates for gender, RAMs, Ramsar Regional Initiatives and World Wetlands Day have been completed. Outreach to potential funders for these priority activities has begun. Full details of the updated Resource Mobilization Work Plan are found in document SC57 Doc.19.

32. The Secretariat has also provided support to Contracting Parties in their fundraising efforts. The Secretariat facilitated meetings (6 and 7 February 2019) between the National Designated Authority of Burkina Faso for the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the IUCN office for West and Central Africa (IUCN/PACO) to develop a national wetland project to be submitted to GCF. The Secretariat also facilitated a planning workshop during the Second Governing Council Meeting of the Ramsar Centre for Eastern Africa (19-20 February 2019) to plan a 2019 activity to develop a sub-regional programme to be submitted to GCF. In the Americas, the Secretariat is supporting countries of the High Andean Wetlands and the Mangroves and Coral Reefs Regional Initiatives in the submission of regional projects to donors (GEF and IKI).

Enhancing the visibility of wetlands and the Convention

33. The visibility of wetlands and the Convention is being raised through a variety of communications outreach efforts. The Secretariat has strengthened information sharing among the stakeholders of the Convention and has increased public awareness about wetland services and benefits through the Ramsar website, social media, the Ramsar Newsletter, and outreach campaigns such as World Wetlands Day and other international days. The Secretariat has taken an approach to speak with “one voice” across the Secretariat to our target audiences about wetlands issues and linking wetlands to relevant policy frameworks such as the SDGs and The Paris Agreement. During the reporting period, the Ramsar website was visited by nearly 280,000 users, and over 100 news stories were published on the website. On average, all Ramsar social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram) have seen a steady increase in engagement over the past year. The Ramsar Newsletter, disseminated every 3-4 months, is now a well-established means of communication between the Secretariat and Contracting Parties.
34. Since the last reporting period, the launch of the *Global Wetland Outlook* and Ramsar COP13 in Dubai, in September and October 2018 respectively, presented important outreach opportunities to give global visibility to the status of wetlands. A comprehensive media outreach strategy was implemented in the weeks leading up to COP13 which included a press release and a media briefing to journalists accredited to the UN in Geneva. In addition, a dedicated website with the *Outlook* was published and a social media campaign conducted. Four leadership pieces authored by the Secretary General were published in the months of August, September and October, all highlighting opportunities and challenges for wetland conservation. These efforts resulted in 1,794 articles and broadcast interviews with a reach of 1.2 billion individuals. Outlets referencing the *Global Wetland Outlook* included Le Monde, Der Spiegel, Daily Mail, South China Morning Post, Times of India and El Tiempo. The equivalent media value of this coverage was EUR 10 million. Additionally, a potential 74.2 million people were reached via social media in a campaign that promoted the key messages of the *Outlook* and COP13.
35. The Secretariat worked closely with the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment of the United Arab Emirates to raise the visibility of wetlands and the Convention on the occasion of COP13 in Dubai. A communication and outreach plan was implemented that included press releases, press conferences and thought-leadership articles that resulted in 218 articles.
36. The Secretariat continues to update and enhance the website at www.ramsar.org, so that it better serves the needs of Contracting Parties and other users. The annual update of the website (all website pages) was completed in February. The homepage features two re-designed blocks to emphasize current important events and projects (currently SC57 and the

Global Wetland Outlook). A new “Quick Search” function will provide a clear and easy access to core Ramsar official documents in the three official languages. It will be integrated within the website in 2019.

37. World Wetlands Day continues to be a powerful outreach platform from which to raise global and national awareness about wetlands. The Secretariat, with funding from Danone, produced a range of information materials to support the outreach efforts by countries in 2019 under the umbrella theme of “wetlands and climate change”. These materials were made available for Parties to download on the World Wetlands Day website. In addition, on the same website, Parties could register their planned activities on a map of events, thus giving visibility to the global reach and national interest of the day. A total of 1,425 events were registered. Furthermore, the Secretariat, in partnership with Canon, organized a photo contest to highlight the beauty of wetlands. The contest received over 400 entries. Secretariat staff participated in events in Burkina Faso, China, Myanmar and Switzerland.
38. The Wetland City Accreditation programme has proven effective in enhancing the visibility of wetlands and the Convention. A webpage on the Ramsar website has been created that features the programme and recognizes the cities accredited at COP13. Discussions are underway with the Ramsar Regional Centre – East Asia, which is leading the development of a network of wetland cities. The Secretariat has submitted a document to the present meeting (document SC57 Doc.26) requesting the Standing Committee to guide the Secretariat to ensure greater clarity in the accreditation process for the current triennium.
39. A key challenge for the Secretariat in enhancing the visibility of wetlands and the Convention is the limited resources and capacity to undertake communication and outreach activities. The Secretariat is addressing this challenge by focusing its efforts on providing communications tools and assets for Parties and other organizations to use, leveraging communications for events such as World Wetlands Day and the Wetland City Accreditation scheme, and pursuing strategic engagement with IOPs and other organizations that have the ability to raise the visibility of wetlands and the Convention.

Strengthening the Secretariat’s efficiency and effectiveness

40. The guiding objective since the current Secretary General took office has been to “organize to deliver” on the Strategic Plan of the Convention and the mandate of the Contracting Parties, and to use the limited resources of the Convention and the capacities of the Secretariat in the most efficient way.
41. Capacity gaps were identified especially in two areas, namely the core function of supporting the governing and subsidiary bodies and the link with relevant policy processes through policy-relevant science. Adjustments were made to job descriptions of vacant posts, in some cases after retirement of the incumbents, and also in the job descriptions of administrative staff, to cover capacity gaps. These changes will result in enhanced support to the governing and subsidiary bodies of the Convention and in strengthened visibility and relevance of the Convention in key policy processes (see above). During the process of recruitment for vacant posts, efforts are being made to ensure regional- and gender-diversity to the extent possible. Currently, 60 % of Secretariat staff are women.
42. Technologies and business practices that can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Secretariat have been actively evaluated and adopted. Of particular importance is the adoption of a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database that is enabling more efficient

management of mailings, meeting registration and contacts, and allowing compliance with new privacy laws. The CRM brings together all contact information managed by the Secretariat into a single database. It was used in managing all aspects of registration for COP13 and is now being used for all correspondence with Parties and management of meetings including SC57 and STRP22. Other technologies that have been adopted include voice-over-internet services for conference calls, online learning (webinars) and higher utilization of digital document sharing mechanisms.

43. A professionally facilitated planning workshop for the Secretariat, conducted in January 2019, focused on assessing progress in the implementation of the 2018 work plan and on developing a new triennial and annual work plan organized around the seven key functions approved by the Standing Committee at SC54. This new streamlined work plan, presented as document SC57 Doc.16, will better enable the Secretariat to focus on those assigned activities, deliverables and outcomes that have been identified by the Parties as being most critical to the effective implementation of the Convention. Mandatory gender equality and mainstreaming training, as called for in Resolution XIII.18, is being organized and will be completed in 2019.
44. Considerable progress has been made in strengthening the Secretariat's efficiency and effectiveness, and in filling gaps in its capabilities. The team has worked hard in this regard, with encouraging results in key areas of work of the Secretariat as described in this report. However, further work is still needed. Moving towards a whole-of-Secretariat approach has presented challenges as this requires changes in ways of working and organizational culture within the Secretariat and in its engagement with Contracting Parties. The Secretariat is developing standard operating procedures that will contribute to making further progress. Other areas for further work include: developing more coherent and coordinated approaches across regions to achieve efficiencies and better serve Contracting Parties; balancing enhanced accountability for implementation of the decisions taken by the COP and Standing Committee with the service provided to Contracting Parties in each region; balancing regional and thematic approaches; further strengthening financial management and operational procedures; and continuing to build capacities and skills in core functional areas of the Secretariat's work.