

Report of the Secretary General

Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to note the reports of the Secretary General for the periods 18 April 2019 – 30 March 2020; 30 March 2020 – 30 April 2021; and 1 May 2021 – 28 February 2022.

1. This report covers the work of the Secretariat from the publishing of the *Report of the Secretary General* to the 59th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC59/2021) on 1 May 2021, through 28 February 2022. It provides both an overview and selected highlights of the work completed during this period. Given that the Standing Committee could not consider the earlier reports at SC58 and SC59, it is asked to also note those reports, published as documents SC58 Doc.6¹ and SC59 Doc.6².
2. This past year was again marked by the COVID-19 pandemic which affected the lives of people across the world. The pandemic continued to have implications on the operations of the Convention, including the postponement of the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP14) to 21-29 November 2022 and the need to hold the third Extraordinary Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (ExCOP3) to change the dates of COP14 and adopt the budget for the continued operation of the Convention in 2022. Additionally, pandemic-related travel restrictions resulted in the cancellation of face-to-face meetings of governing and subsidiary bodies, and in limitations to implementation of its provisions by Contracting Parties and the Secretariat. Still, considerable action continued to be taken by both Contracting Parties and the Secretariat to implement the decisions taken at the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP13) and at SC57, SC58 and SC59/2021, adapting to the context of the new working environment resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. From the Secretariat's perspective, actions were taken to continue to enable staff to effectively work from home when advised by the relevant national authorities, with a return to the office on 14 February. Previous efforts to embrace new technologies and strengthen staff capacities allowed the Secretariat to support the work of Contracting Parties and coordinate its work effectively. Despite the challenges presented by COVID-19, the Secretariat continues 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 continues to take assigned actions on Resolutions adopted by COP13 and decisions of SC57, SC58 and SC59/2021 as the basis of its workplan. The main areas of work during the reporting period are described in this report, including implications of and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Documents prepared for the present resumed session of

¹ <https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc58-doc6-report-of-the-secretary-general>

² <https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc59-doc6-report-of-the-secretary-general>

the 59th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC59/2022) provide further detail on various areas of the Secretariat's work.

3. In January 2022, the Secretariat reviewed progress made in 2021 regarding the actions and indicators identified in the 2019-2021 triennial workplan approved by Decision SC57-21 and the annual workplan for 2021 approved by Decision SC59-12, and to identify specific activities for 2022. This review, which took place during five virtual sessions on Zoom in January 2022, confirmed successful implementation of planned activities despite the challenges of the pandemic, while activities that required travel had to be postponed. It also showed considerable progress in the triennium in completing the desired results identified across the functional areas included in the workplan approved by the Standing Committee. The 2022 workplan presented to SC59/2022 in Document SC59/2022 Doc.18 extends work in core areas of the Secretariat identified in the 2019-2021 workplan and includes those that could not be completed due to the pandemic, such as work related to COP14 and its preparatory process. As in previous years, the Secretariat's workplan continues to serve as the basis for the work of the Secretariat and for the development of individual workplans for all staff and evaluation of staff performance. The 2022 work plan is presented to SC59/2022 for approval in document SC59/2022 Doc.18³.

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 despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, 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 of the Contracting Parties. This area of work has thus continued to be prioritized while utilizing new tools and processes adapted to the new operating environment due to the pandemic. The workplan 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, the Standing Committee and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP).
6. During the reporting period the Secretariat organized the online 59th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC59/2021) from 21 to 25 June 2021. The Secretariat consulted with the Executive Team to submit proposals to the Standing Committee to address urgent and time-sensitive matters in the agenda of SC59/2021. In advance of SC59/2021 the Secretariat organized meetings of the Subgroup on Finance and the Management Working Group, which took place immediately prior to the meeting, and of other Working Groups as described below. SC59/2021 was attended by 95 participants representing 40 Contracting Parties, with 52% female and 48% male participation. During the virtual meeting of SC59, Contracting Parties took 38 decisions. The SC decided that the second part of SC59 was to be held in 2022 at a proper time before the date established for COP14.
7. Prior to SC59, the Secretariat supported an intersessional process from September 2020 to May 2021 whereby the Standing Committee took critical decisions including in regard to financial matters, organization of SC59 and postponement of COP14. The Secretariat provided support through implementing a process in line with the Rules of Procedure under which Contracting Parties could comment on proposed decisions via email (full comments were also provided for

³<https://www.ramsar.org/document/sc592022-doc18-integrated-secretariat-2022-annual-plan-as-an-extension-of-the-approved>

transparency), with decisions amended to reflect the views of Parties, until consensus on a decision was reached. Contracting Parties made ten intersessional decisions before SC59/2021 and four additional ones before the resumed session of SC59 in 2022.

8. A resumed session of SC59 took place on 15 November to set in motion the process of recruitment of the next Secretary General, as the second term of the current Secretary General will end on 21 August 2022. The Standing Committee appointed a selection committee with a decision regarding the successful candidate to be made at the resumed session of SC59 in May 2022.
9. In light of the pandemic, the Secretariat organized ExCOP3, the first such meeting held virtually, from 25 October 2021 to 4 November 2022, for the purpose of considering and approving the postponement of COP14 and the budget for the operation of the Convention in 2022. The meeting was attended by 303 participants from 126 Contracting Parties, with 48% female and 52% male participation. Despite the challenges related to a virtual setting and most notably the application of the Rules of Procedure regarding credentials and quorum, the meeting successfully adopted the two Resolutions, on the 2022 budget and the postponement to 2022 and new dates of COP14.
10. As part of the organization of ExCOP3, the Secretariat provided support to the work of the Conference Bureau, the Finance Committee and the Credentials Committee established by the ExCOP3. The Secretariat also supported Contracting Parties in preparing for the Extraordinary COP. The Secretariat organized four virtual regional meetings held between 17 and 27 September. Participants from 120 Contracting Parties attended these meetings where the two draft resolutions, the process for submitting credentials and other matters related to participation in the virtual Extraordinary COP were discussed.
11. For SC59/2021 and ExCOP3 the Secretariat prepared webpages and notified all Contracting Parties in accordance with the Rules of Procedure. Information for the meetings was communicated to Contracting Parties via Diplomatic Notes and Ramsar Exchange messages. The Secretariat also notified all Contracting Parties of the intersessional decisions taken and created specific pages in the website with the intersessional decisions⁴ and notifications⁵. The Secretariat also supported Standing Committee members on request in fulfilling their function of representing the views of the Parties in their regions and keeping the Parties informed of ongoing work and consultations of the Standing Committee and its Working Groups.
12. Feedback from the participants in the Standing Committee meetings and the Extraordinary COP was that the meetings were well organized, and the online meeting technology worked well and supported virtual decision making. The Secretariat was acknowledged for its innovative approach in using new technology and ways of working to facilitate consultation and decision making. In particular, Parties appreciated the advance sessions to test connectivity and the use of the platform, and the technical support offered during the meetings. Further, participants provided positive feedback on the Secretariat's support for the credentials process and regional preparatory meetings.
13. The Secretariat has continued to support Working Groups established by COP13 and the Standing Committee. As provided by Decision SC59-36, Working Groups whose mandate included submission of draft resolutions for consideration by COP14 could submit draft

⁴ See <https://www.ramsar.org/document/list-of-the-intersessional-decisions-of-the-standing-committee-subsequent-to-its-virtual>.

⁵ See <https://contacts.ramsar.org/notifications>.

resolutions by 24 March 2022. The Secretariat organized teleconferences, prepared meeting agendas and minutes, and secured and managed consultancies that supported the Working Groups. The Secretariat also assisted in the preparation of Working Group reports and documents presented to SC59 and the resumed session of SC59. Support has been provided to the following Groups:

- i. Effectiveness Working Group – The Secretariat has continued to manage the administrative matters related to consultancy contracts and as requested.
 - ii. Working Group on the review of the Strategic Plan – The Secretariat supported the Working Group in fulfilling the requests listed in Annex 1 of Resolution XIII.5, including through a consultancy, notably to review the fourth Strategic Plan (SP4), identify potential refinements to SP4 and any elements that can contribute to the preparation of a new Strategic Plan after 2024. The Working Group has prepared a draft resolution for consideration at the resumed session of SC59/2022.
 - iii. Observer Status Working Group – The Secretariat has facilitated several calls of the Working Group and provided summary reports. Additionally, the Secretariat supported the Working Group on the follow-up to the independent legal analysis consultancy requested in Decision SC57-14 and in developing the terms of reference (TORs) for the financial analysis of the legal status of the Secretariat requested in Post-SC58 Intersessional Decision 09 on 16 March 2021.
 - iv. Working Group on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIs) – With guidance from Contracting Parties, the Secretariat supported the Group’s work to prepare a draft resolution for consideration at the resumed session of SC59/2022.
14. The Secretariat provided support to the Subgroup on Finance throughout the reporting period and particularly before SC59/2021 during the virtual sessions on 21 and 24 June 2021 and before ExCOP3, to develop the proposal for the 2022 budget, including virtual sessions on 26 and 27 October 2021. Finally, at the beginning of 2021, the Secretariat provided support to the Subgroup during the virtual session on 13 January 2021 for the intersessional decisions of the Standing Committee subsequent to its virtual 58th meeting.
 15. The Secretariat supported the work of the Management Working Group on STRP matters, facilitating virtual meetings on 14 June 2021 and 13 January 2022. The meetings reviewed progress in the delivery of the STRP’s highest priority tasks, and provided guidance on these as well as on the *Global Wetland Outlook: Special Edition 2021* and its alignment with the theme of the 50th Anniversary of the Convention, and the *ad-hoc* advisory task on Criterion 6 in accordance with intersessional decisions of the Standing Committee.
 16. The Secretariat provided support to the STRP over this reporting period as follows:
 - i. Supporting the work of the task leads and working groups to finalize drafts for the highest-priority tasks, including: working with external consultants supporting the work of the Panel, organizing regular calls with the STRP Chair, Vice-Chair and task leads, coordinating the review process for drafts and contributing to communication flows with Panel members as well as with STRP National Focal Points through the virtual STRP workspace.

- ii. Managing the process for production of final STRP products, including translation and layout. All highest priority tasks of the STRP are concluded or are at the final stage of production.
 - iii. Supporting launch and outreach, including preparing materials and planning launch events/webinars and communication activities in consultation with the STRP Chair and Panel members.
 - iv. Supporting the STRP Chair with the process of setting future scientific and technical priorities, including organization of virtual task group meetings in January 2022 and February 2022, and supporting preparation of documents for SC59/2022.
 - v. Facilitating participation of the STRP Chair and Vice-Chair in the following meetings:
 - a. The 16th and 17th Meetings of the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and Bureau of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES);
 - b. The 16th Meeting of the Technical Committee of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA); and
 - c. Online panel discussions for World Wetlands Day 2022.
17. The Secretariat continued to support the CEPA Oversight Panel in the preparation of two draft resolutions through organizing a meeting of the Panel on 23 February 2022.
18. The Secretariat has been preparing the meetings of the governing bodies of the Convention scheduled for 2022, notably the resumed session of SC59 (SC59/2022) to be held from 23 to 27 May 2022 and COP14 scheduled for 21 to 29 November 2022. The Secretariat is actively engaging with the host of COP14 to advance the meeting plans and finalize the host country agreement. It also supported a meeting of the Subgroup on COP14 on 15 December 2021 with the aim of coordinating preparations, including proposed outcomes.
19. A major highlight was the work carried out to implement Resolution XIII.1 on *World Wetlands Day*. The Secretariat continued to assist a group of interested Contracting Parties under the leadership of Costa Rica in the process of preparing a draft resolution for submission to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The process was delayed in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Once UNGA resumed its work, the Secretariat supported the group to move the process forward, including through the preparation of the draft resolution, a concept note shared with all Contracting Parties and importantly an online high-level event held on 7 July 2021, hosted by Slovenia, Costa Rica, Mexico and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in partnership with the Secretariat. The Secretariat also engaged in the consultations held by Permanent Missions in New York and communicated to all Contracting Parties once the draft resolution was scheduled to be presented, to ensure support through the Permanent Missions. On 30 August 2021, the UNGA, in Resolution 75/317, proclaimed 2 February as World Wetlands Day. The Resolution, co-sponsored by 75 Member States, acknowledges the essential role of wetlands in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals but also that they are among the ecosystems with the highest rates of decline, loss and degradation. Importantly, the Resolution calls on Member States, agencies of the United Nations and other actors to observe the day, and the UNGA invites the Secretariat to provide a report at the next session of UNGA in 2022, providing an opportunity for a submission of a substantive draft resolution on wetlands. World Wetlands Day 2022 was the first time the occasion was observed as a United Nations international day, providing a unique opportunity to

raise commitments and actions for wetlands' conservation and wise use (see paragraph 55 below for more details).

20. The Secretariat continues to support Resolution XIII.6 on *Language strategy for the Convention* and invites Parties to provide translated Convention on Wetlands documents of wider relevance for publication on the Convention's website.
21. The Secretariat continues to standardize practices and systems in its support to the meetings and processes of the governing and subsidiary bodies of the Convention. All related data and information are managed through a constituent relationship management (CRM) system that continues to be enhanced to efficiently manage mailings, correspondence, meeting registration, nomination processes and handling of meeting credentials. The CRM is currently being used for all correspondence with Contracting Parties and for the organization of meetings, including the SC59 virtual meetings the third extraordinary session of the COP, meetings of the Subgroups and Working Groups and capacity-building webinars. This provides the Secretariat with better visibility on participation for all meetings, including gender participation, and enables meetings and communications to be organized more efficiently. The Secretariat has also deployed Microsoft Teams for strengthened, more efficient communication and collaboration across the Secretariat, and enhanced engagement with partners and other organization, including UN agencies and other multilateral environmental agreements.
22. The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to present challenges for Contracting Parties and the Secretariat in conducting the work of the Convention's governing and subsidiary meetings. In particular, it was not possible in the reporting period to have face-to-face meetings. As mentioned above, the Secretariat supported decision-making on prioritized issues and operation of Working Groups, using appropriate technologies. But working virtually, and with a home-based team, has resulted in increased work demands on the Secretariat as virtual decision-making processes take more time, thus putting pressure on the Secretariat's capacities. At the same time, it has been an opportunity for the Secretariat to improve its capacities and develop new approaches to serve Contracting Parties.

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

23. 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, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the ongoing negotiation of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework are driving national and international planning and funding efforts, increased attention continues to be paid to ensure that wetlands and the work of Contracting Parties under the Convention contribute to these policy frameworks.
24. As instructed in Resolution XIII.7 on *Enhancing the Convention's visibility and synergies with other multilateral environmental agreements and other international institutions* and Decision SC53-17, the Secretariat continues to actively engage in discussions regarding achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including as co-custodian of SDG 6 Indicator 6.6.1 (on change in extent of water-related ecosystems), as instructed in Decision SC53-17. The Secretariat participated in the 12th meeting of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), which took place virtually from 2 to 4 November 2021. The main outcomes of this meeting were to: i) review and update the tier classification of indicators; ii) review the refinement proposals of the global SDG framework; iii) discuss the work of the

IAEG-SDG sub-group on metadata review; iv) review the work of the working groups of the IAEG-SDGs; v) share best practices on implementation, monitoring and reporting on SDGs, including national, regional, and global SDG reporting; and vi) review the workplan and next steps of the IAEG-SDGs. As was the case for the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2021, the Secretariat is preparing a joint storyline with UNEP for the UN Secretary General Report to the High Level Political Forum in July 2022. The Secretariat also continues to engage with UN-Water on the work programme for SDG 6.

25. In line with Resolution XIII.7 and Decision SC57-47 on wetland inventories, the Secretariat continues to support Contracting Parties with the development of wetlands inventories and completing and refining information on wetland extent for reporting on SDG Indicator 6.6.1 through National Reports. An update of the activities undertaken to support Contracting Parties on wetland inventories and reporting on wetland extent for SDG 6 Indicator 6.6.1 is provided in document SC59/2022 Doc.9.
26. The Secretariat has actively supported the achievement of SDG 14 (“Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”). As noted in previous reports, the Secretary General is co-focal point with IUCN for the Community of Ocean Action on Mangroves. In this capacity she participated in the event “Keeping the Momentum for Ocean Action”, as part of the Webinar series for 2021 on Implementing SDG 14 with the Communities of Ocean Action, organized by UN DESA towards the coming UN Ocean Conference. In addition, the Secretariat participates in Informal Preparatory Working Group 2 on “Managing, protecting, conserving and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems”, and provided input towards the Concept Paper for Interactive Dialogue 2, addressing SDG Targets 14.2 and 14.5.
27. On 18 November 2021 the Secretariat and other partners of the Action Platform for Source to Sea Management (S2S platform), including the Global Water Partnership, UNESCO Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP), Stockholm International Water Institute and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) co-organized an event in the framework of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. Titled “Starting at the Source to Save the Ocean”, the event explored ways to enhance collaboration across freshwater and marine communities in monitoring and reducing pollution across inland, coastal and marine ecosystems. The event constituted a contribution to the Ocean Decade Laboratories convened to catalyze action for the Ocean Decade, under the theme “A Clean Ocean”. The Secretary General also provided a video speech with other heads of organizations, including UN agency leaders, to raise awareness of Source to Sea Management approaches through social media.
28. The Secretariat has actively engaged in supporting the achievement of SDG15 (“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 2021, the Secretariat participated actively in the CBD’s preparatory process for the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (the “UN Biodiversity Conference”, CBD COP 15). Main highlights include:
 - i. The Secretary General delivered a video statement at the High-Level Segment of CBD COP 15 (Part 1) on 12 October 2021.
 - ii. A joint statement of the Biodiversity Liaison Group (BLG) was delivered on 12 October 2021 at the Panel “Promoting synergistic action for biodiversity, climate, land and oceans” at the High-Level Segment of CBD COP 15 (Part 1).

- iii. The Secretariat provided inputs to the third meeting of the Open-ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework from 23 August to 3 September 2021 and at the meetings of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice and SBI in 2022.
 - iv. The Secretary General participated in the Executive Briefing on the United Nations Biodiversity Conference on 2 November 2021 organized by the Geneva Environment Network to highlight the outcomes of Part 1 of and the next steps for Part 2, as well as the Subsidiary Bodies and Open-ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework meetings scheduled to take place in 2022.
 - v. The Secretary General participated in the 27th Senior Officials Meeting of the United Nations Environment Management Group (EMG) held virtually on 7 October 2021, which established an EMG Issue Management Group on Biodiversity to facilitate and enable a streamlined approach and support the implementation of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, the UN Common Approach to Biodiversity and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.
29. The Secretariat continues to participate actively in the BLG. The Secretary General participated in the virtual meeting of the BLG on 6 October 2021 with a major focus on engagement in the process for the development of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, CBD COP 15 and the the Glasgow Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 26).
30. Given the critical role played by wetlands in climate change mitigation and adaptation, the Secretariat has engaged extensively on this issue. Highlights include:
- i. In the leadup to UNFCCC COP 26 the Secretariat prepared a brief on harnessing wetland wise use, protection and restoration in delivering climate change outcomes. The brief synthesizes information on relevant provisions of Resolutions adopted by the COP of the Convention on Wetlands, as well as relevant guidance documents and knowledge products prepared by the STRP. The brief is available in the three languages of the Convention.
 - ii. During UNFCCC COP 26 the Secretary General was a speaker in the official side event titled “CBD COP 15: Strengthening Synergies through the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and Promoting Transformational Change to Restore Balance with Nature” held on 6 November 2021.
 - iii. The Secretariat co-organized three events during UNFCCC COP 26, exploring different aspects of wetlands action for climate change outcomes: “Financing Wetlands Conservation and Restoration for Climate Benefits – Challenges and Opportunities”, with input from national governments, multilateral development banks and development agencies; “Partners for Wetlands: Decade for Wetland Restoration”, organized in collaboration with the six International Organization Partners (IOPs) of the Convention: and “Leveraging MEA synergies in peatland protection and restoration for climate outcomes”, in collaboration with the Secretariats of the UNFCCC, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), CBD and state partners of the Global Peatlands Initiative.
 - iv. Secretariat staff participated as speakers or panelists in numerous other events during UNFCCC COP 26, including: “Enhancing water stewardship for climate change adaptation and mitigation”; “Policy Dialogue to Strengthen Blue Carbon’s Contribution to Carbon

Neutrality”; “Climate change mitigation and adaptation through coastal ecosystems conservation and restoration”; “NbS and Climate Change: Harnessing the power of ecosystems for adaptation and mitigation”; “Peatlands and wider wetland conservation, restoration and management”; “International Blue Carbon Partnership - Working together to deliver outcomes for climate, the environment and people”; “Wetland conservation, restoration and management – from Scotland to the Arctic”; “Peatlands, Climate Change and Cultural Heritage: Global Perspectives, Problems, Solutions”; and “Transboundary wetland: From mitigation to adaptation”.

31. The Secretariat has engaged extensively in dialogues and processes relating to water. The Secretariat actively engaged in UN Water work, especially in the context of SDG 6 and Indicator 6.6.1. For example, the Secretariat contributed towards the United Nations World Water Development Report (WWDR) 2022: *Groundwater: Making the invisible visible*, to be launched on World Water Day, 22 March 2022. The Secretariat also contributed to World Water Week, including through participating in the session “Pathways for protection: Blended solutions to protect and manage rivers” held on 27 August 2021. Input focused on how the concept of wise use can be applied towards solutions that combine riverine ecosystem and natural infrastructure protection while supporting social, cultural and economic needs. The Secretariat is participating in Action Group 1.E “Halt the loss of aquatic biodiversity and invasive species in water ecosystems”. The Secretariat also participated remotely in the 9th World Water Forum in Dakar, Senegal 21-29 March 2022, with the Secretary General joining a dialogue hosted by France on Wetlands and the Convention. The Secretariat also participated in MOP9 of the UN Water Convention in Geneva, from 29 September to 1 October 2021, to explore possible synergies and future cooperation, notably in transboundary river basins that are also covered by Ramsar Regional Initiatives (covering the Amazon, Senegal and Niger river basins, Central and Eastern Africa, and Central and West Asia).
32. As a Global Partner of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the Secretariat continues to actively engage in this agenda and the task forces of the aquatic and transitional ecosystems monitoring and evaluation framework and best practices. These engagements informed the consideration of SDG 6 Indicator 6.6.1 “Change in the extent of water-related ecosystems over time” for which the Convention is co-custodian and various targets of the Convention’s fourth Strategic Plan as priority indicators of the UN Decade’s monitoring framework. To mark the opening of the UN Decade on 5 June 2021, the Secretariat produced [three fact sheets](#) highlighting the untapped potential of wetlands to assist restoration efforts by Contracting Parties, policy makers and practitioners.
33. The Secretariat participated in the IUCN World Conservation Congress, including in dialogues relating to biodiversity and the formation of the emerging Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework:
 - i. The Secretary General delivered remarks in the Opening Plenary “Our Freshwater Global Risk: Taking Actions to Reverse the Trend” on 4 September 2021. Her intervention highlighted the importance of wetland ecosystems in supplying water for people and nature, achieving the emerging Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and delivering on the sustainable development goals.
 - ii. The Secretary General participated as a panelist in the Closing Plenary, “A blue breakthrough”, on 7 September 2021. In her interventions she emphasized the importance of healthy wetlands for ocean health, work under the Convention on Wetlands to enshrine the “wise use” concept, and the commitment of Contracting Parties to maintain health of

wetlands as key to human wellbeing, carbon storage, disaster risk reduction and biodiversity benefits.

- iii. The Secretary General and other Secretariat staff participated in a session titled “Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework: a Recipe for Success” on 5 September 2021. She highlighted the importance of the Convention on Wetlands and other biodiversity-related conventions for implementing the Global Biodiversity Framework, with their specific mandates, resources and indicators to measure progress. The intervention was captured in the official Congress event summary.
 - iv. The Secretary General participated in a high-level roundtable organized by the Ministère de l’Écologie of France on 5 September 2021, exploring how France and the EU can further scale wetlands actions. She presented the French delegation with a certificate to mark the designation of France’s latest Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar Site), Baie d’Audierne.
 - v. The Secretary General gave closing remarks in a session titled “Deep Time 2029: What must we do now in 2021, to successfully address the Nature Emergency by 2050?” on 5 September 2021. She noted the importance of using existing indicators and reporting frameworks to track progress towards goals and targets, drawing on relevant initiatives and frameworks such the Convention on Wetlands and its mandate. She also highlighted the importance of ensuring that all interventions and efforts are fully participatory.
 - vi. The Secretary General participated as a panellist in the session “IUCN Global Species Action Plan: supporting implementation of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework through species conservation” on 6 September 2021. She emphasized the contribution of the Convention on Wetlands to species conservation and how designation of Ramsar Sites as well as broader ecosystem protection and restoration focusing on wetlands can be leveraged.
 - vii. Secretariat staff also made contributions to numerous other events as speakers or panellists including: “The Global Biodiversity Framework and freshwater ecosystems: Moving to implementation”; “Protecting aquascapes: integrating freshwater, estuarine and marine conservation”; “Partners for Wetlands’ Decade for Wetland Restoration”; and “Development of a global wetland training facility”.
34. The Secretariat remains committed to advancing SDG 5 on gender equality and mainstreaming gender considerations across the activities and meetings of the Convention. As an example, the Secretariat continues to collect data and statistics related to gender representation as part of efforts to monitor progress towards gender parity. Furthermore, the Secretariat whenever relevant reminds Contracting Parties to consider nominating female representatives as part of their delegations. Contracting Parties are reminded that a gender guidance document⁶ with supporting case studies is available in three languages on the Convention website to support the implementation of Resolution XIII.18 on *Gender and wetlands* and to facilitate gender mainstreaming at national level.⁷

⁶ See <https://www.ramsar.org/document/guidance-on-mainstreaming-gender-under-the-ramsar-convention-on-wetlands-0>

⁷ <https://www.ramsar.org/resources/training-webinar-mainstreaming-gender-under-the-convention-on-wetlands>

35. The Secretary General is one of the International Gender Champions (IGCs), a network of ambassadors and heads of agencies established initially in Geneva, Switzerland, and now active in other cities. The Secretary General has implemented her commitment to this initiative throughout the reporting period, and participated in the network's activities including its annual meeting to review progress during 2021 and priorities for 2022. The Secretariat has adjusted its systems to better promote and report on gender balance in the delegations to meetings of governing and subsidiary bodies of the Convention.
36. The Secretariat continues to strengthen its relationship with the Geneva-based Permanent Missions to the United Nations and UN agencies. The Secretariat had planned a briefing for the Permanent Missions on the linkages between wetlands and the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and on important issues in the SC59/2021 agenda and COP14. The briefing scheduled for 2021 was cancelled due to the COVID-19 situation. The Secretariat is planning a briefing in 2022 prior to COP14.
37. The Secretariat continued to contribute to the InforMEA initiative and participated in the 12th meeting of the InforMEA Steering Committee that took place virtually on 16 November 2021. The Secretariat contributed on issues including API implementation, semantic indexing and e-learning.
38. Other events and processes that the Secretariat participated in include:
 - i. The 11th International Wetlands Conference (INTECOL), held online from 10 to 15 October 2021 under the theme "Traditional Knowledge and Innovative Science in Wetland Research & Management".
 - ii. The 18th World Lake Conference (WLC18). The Secretariat delivered a presentation on the Convention of Wetlands as part of the UNEP-ILEC Special Session on 10 November 2021.
 - iii. A dialogue on nature-based solutions and water organized by IUCN and the Geneva Environment Network on 22 November 2021. The event was part of a one-year series of webinars to facilitate engagement and understanding on nature-based solutions.
39. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting postponement of meetings of relevant policy processes, there was considerable activity in advancing work, creating important opportunities for engagement by the Secretariat to position wetlands and the work of the Convention in the global agendas on biodiversity, sustainable development and climate change. In fulfilment of its mandate, the Secretariat continued its engagement with relevant and prioritized MEAs and UN processes. However, as reported previously, it remains a major challenge that the Secretariat does not have access to the UNGA, or the UN Economic and Social Council, the UN platform for debate on sustainable development. The proposal to obtain observer status was submitted by Uruguay, then Chair of the Standing Committee, in 2017, but its consideration has been deferred. The Secretariat has continued to face limitations to its engagement in the UN, including UNGA and UN-Water processes. This is an issue being addressed by the Standing Committee's Working Group on Observer Status.

Strengthening support and enabling implementation

40. During the reporting period (1 May 2021 – 28 February 2022), the Secretariat provided support for the designation of 22 new Ramsar Sites and updates of the information for 31 Sites. This

included support in the transfer of data into the Ramsar Sites Information System (RSIS), and publication and translation of Site summaries.

41. Due to the travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, none of the Ramsar Advisory Missions (RAMs) in preparation for Malawi (Lake Chilwa), Nicaragua (Sistema de Humedales de Bahía de Bluefields) and Tunisia (Sebkhet Sejoumi) could be undertaken. The Secretariat is monitoring the situation so that the RAMs can be conducted as soon as the conditions allow this work to proceed.
42. Nineteen RRI benefited from guidance to submit annual reports to SC59/2022. The Secretariat regularly participated in the steering committee meetings of, *inter alia*, the Mediterranean Wetlands Ramsar Regional Initiative (MedWet), the Ramsar Centres for Eastern Africa (RAMCEA), for East Asia (RRC-EA), and for Training and Research in the Western Hemisphere (CREHO), the Ramsar Regional Initiatives for the Conservation and Wise Use of the Plata River Basin¹², for the Amazon River Basin, for the Niger River Basin (NigerWet), for West African Coastal Zone Wetlands (WACoWet) and provided support to the operations of RRIs, including discussions on funding needs and opportunities, supporting the review of RAMCEA's strategic plan and a new statute for NigerWet. The Secretariat participated in RRI-led events including the Youth Think Tank Competition organized by the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) and the Ramsar Regional Initiative for Central Asia (RRI-CA) Jubilee Event.
43. The Secretariat also supported the fundraising activities of the Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative (IBRRI) to identify new sources for funding. The Secretariat disbursed the African Voluntary Contribution funds to RRIs in Africa. WACoWET used this additional resource to receive funding from the Regional Partnership for Coastal and Marine Conservation in West Africa (PRCM).
44. The provision of technical support to Contracting Parties continued to evolve with travel limitations resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Secretariat continued to support capacity-building needs of Contracting Parties and strengthened the use of virtual technologies to increase its reach. It further developed webinars to reach an increasing number of Contracting Parties with the aim to further support implementation of the Convention. During this reporting period, the Secretariat organized a series of eight webinars on the following topics:
 - i. 7 July 2021: "Wetlands: Key Enablers for a Resilient and Sustainable Recovery" (English with French and Spanish interpretation).
 - ii. 20 October 2021: "Connecting for Wetlands Action: An Intergenerational Dialogue" (English with French and Spanish interpretation).
 - iii. 3 December 2021: "Financing Mechanisms for Freshwater Ecosystems" (English with French and Spanish interpretation).
 - iv. 24 January 2022: RSIS training for National Focal Points (NFPs) (in French).
 - v. 28 January 2022: RSIS training for NFPs (in English).
 - vi. 28 January 2022: RSIS training for NFPs (in Spanish).
 - vii. 31 January 2022: "Acting for Wetlands: Challenges and Opportunities Ecosystems" (English with French and Spanish interpretation).

In total, these webinars saw 425 participants join from 113 countries; with 57% female and 43% male participation. Building on the success and learnings of these webinars, the Secretariat is planning additional webinars and developing additional capacity-building initiatives in 2022.

45. The Secretariat continues to work to identify strategic partnerships to enhance the support to Contracting Parties at scale. As a partner of the Global Peatlands Initiative, the Secretariat provided support to the preparation of its main project funded by the German Climate Initiative (IKI) with a focus on global peatland mapping and country programmes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, Peru and the Republic of the Congo. The Secretariat also joined the development team of the Global Peatland Assessment, coordinated by UNEP-WCMC, to involve STRP expertise and ensure development of a useful assessment for reporting at national level, including for SDG Indicator 6.6.1, and to provide Parties the opportunity to identify possible gaps.
46. The Secretariat and UNEP continue to develop cooperative activities to promote synergies and improve the implementation of the Convention, and actions are underway to renew the Memorandum of Understanding.
47. The Secretariat continues to strengthen its collaboration with the IOPs. Periodic teleconferences between the partners are held to review implementation of the Joint Activities for Collaboration in the renewed Memorandum of Cooperation. The IOPs contributed to the development of the 50th Anniversary campaign and actively supported World Wetlands Day 2022.
48. The Secretariat and Danone renewed and signed a three-year Partnership Agreement (2022 to 2024) in December 2021 to increase global visibility and understanding of wetlands among public and private sector decision-makers. The Partnership Agreement with a total value of EUR 240,000 lays out three main areas of cooperation:
 - i. Raise awareness on the importance of wetlands to human and planetary health among public and private sector audiences through the global World Wetlands Day campaign;
 - ii. Accelerate adoption of best conservation practices by financing wetlands conservation. Danone provided a USD 10,000 Evian Special Prize to each of the three recipients of the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards and an additional 10,000 EUR to the Action for Wetlands Fund. This Fund was announced with requests for proposals on World Wetlands Day, 2 February; and
 - iii. Facilitate scientific knowledge dissemination to inform decision-making and promote sustainable management practices of wetlands, including drawing on the work of the STRP.
49. During this reporting period the Secretariat, Danone and WWF developed a [training module](#) on facilitating public and private sector engagement that was launched at a side event during UNFCCC COP 26 in November 2021. Furthermore, a training webinar focusing on Financing Mechanisms for Freshwater ecosystems was organized for Contracting Parties and held in December 2021. A recording of the webinar and the link to enroll in the training course are available to download on the Convention's website.
50. The Secretariat continues to implement the Resource Mobilization Work Plan approved for the triennium. In 2021, there was an increase in voluntary non-core contributions compared to 2020, as activities could resume. In 2021 contributions amounted CHF 462k comparing to CHF 47K received in 2020. Fundraising for non-core priorities continued with outreach to public and private donors during the reporting period to mobilize funds for World Wetlands Day, wetland inventories, RRIs, the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards, COP14 delegates' travel and the development of an Introductory Course on the Convention for newcomers. The Introductory

Course is under development and when complete will be available on the Conventions' website and the United Nations InforMEA learning and knowledge platform.

51. The list of fundraising priorities is published and can be accessed under the Resource Mobilization page of the website. A fundraising proposal to facilitate delegate travel to attend COP14 was shared with 25 prospective donors.. Updating of the funding organization database continued to facilitate resource mobilization efforts of Contracting Parties as a searchable database. It currently lists 119 funding organizations. On this same page, Contracting Parties can also view current calls for proposals when they are published by the Secretariat. The database can be accessed under the [Resource Mobilization page](#) of the website.

Enhancing the visibility of wetlands and the Convention

52. The visibility of wetlands and the Convention has increased 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 Convention's [website](#), social media, newsletter, media and outreach campaigns such as World Wetlands Day, other international days and, importantly during 2021, through the 50th Anniversary campaign. The Secretariat continues to take an approach of speaking with "one voice" across the Secretariat to our target audiences about wetland issues and, importantly, linking wetlands to relevant policy frameworks such as the SDGs, the Paris Agreement and the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework as described in the section on the Secretariat's engagement in the global policy agenda.
53. During the reporting period 280,293 users visited the Convention website (a 45% increase since the previous reporting year). All Convention social media platforms have seen a steady increase in engagement over the past year. Twitter is the fastest growing channel, with an audience increase of 13% over the past year. Facebook and Instagram register a steady growth of around 7% respectively. Currently the Convention's Twitter account has 26K followers, Instagram 8.9K and Facebook 18K. More recently, the Secretariat launched the Convention's LinkedIn account and have gained 1.7K followers to date.
54. The Secretariat continued work to ensure the accessibility of online meeting documents and reports through the first session of SC59/2021 in June 2021 and ExCOP3 in October. Other communications with Contracting Parties were visible through the creation of a "Notifications" function on the website home page.
55. The 2022 World Wetlands Day campaign highlighted the importance of actions to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands for human and planetary health. "Wetlands Action for People and Nature" was the theme for the first celebration of World Wetlands Day as a United Nations International Day (see paragraph 15). The Secretariat provided communication and campaign resources to support national outreach activities. At the time of writing this report, over 1,250 country events have been added to the [global map of World Wetlands Day events](#). In addition, the Secretariat invited the heads of relevant United Nations agencies and the IOPs to observe World Wetlands Day, as requested by the UN General Assembly Resolution, by providing video statements and support for the global social media campaign. Video statements were received from the heads of UNEP, CBD, CITES, FAO, UNFCCC and written statements were provided by heads of UNDP, CMS, African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement, all highlighting the importance of wetlands. The UN Secretary General tweeted on World Wetlands Day. Importantly a page was created on the [webpage of the UN on World Wetlands Day](#). Heads of IOPs also provided statements, including Wetlands International and

IWMI. All these statements were promoted from the Convention's social media account and are available to view on the [World Wetlands Day website](#). As part of the World Wetlands Day global launch, the Secretariat organized a virtual panel on 31 January 2022, titled "Acting for wetlands – challenges and solutions". The interactive panel discussion explored priority actions for wetlands nationally and internationally, including new partnerships and investments. The panel discussion was moderated by the Secretary General of the Convention and included speakers from the government of Costa Rica, a representative of UNDP's Biodiversity Finance Initiative, the current vice chair of the STRP panel and the Head of Birdlife International. A recording of the virtual event is available to view on [the Convention's website](#).

56. Digital platforms and in particular social media are proving to be powerful mediums to amplify our messages and reach larger and diverse audiences. This can be confirmed by the 436 million social media posts to mark World Wetlands Day driven by collective campaigns by the Secretariat, governments, international and other partner organizations.
57. During the reporting period the Convention increased its proactive engagement with international media outlets to raise awareness of wetlands and the Convention around key moments, such as UNFCCC COP 26, the launch of *Global Wetlands Outlook 2021: Special Edition* and World Wetlands Day.
58. The 50th Anniversary campaign was launched in March 2021, following World Wetlands Day. A suite of campaign materials was made available to Parties on a dedicated campaign website. Assets and resources included the 50th Anniversary logo, 50th Anniversary video, brand guidelines, social media toolkit, a video, social media tiles, fact sheets and gifs. All campaign resources were available in English, French and Spanish. The campaign highlighted key international days throughout 2021, these included World Water Day (22 March), International Day for Biological Diversity (22 May), World Ocean Day (8 June), International Youth Day (12 August), and International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction (13 October).
59. For strategically important international days, the Secretariat released written and video statements by the Secretary General acknowledging the importance of each topic in relation to wetlands. A suite of themed communication materials for each respective international day was provided on the campaign website, which included short animation videos, social media tiles and social media posts. These materials were provided in English, French and Spanish. COP14 in October 2021 was planned as a major milestone in the campaign. While its postponement naturally effected engagement, the Secretariat sustained strong engagement across platforms (see below).
60. From August to October youth were invited to engage in the 50th anniversary campaign. The campaign website featured content from youth including an open letter and stories from youth. On 20 October 2021 the Secretariat hosted an online event, titled: "Connecting for wetlands action: An intergenerational dialogue" which was opened by the Secretary General and hosted a panel of speakers across different generations and was moderated by representatives of youth organisations. The event focused on current youth action for wetlands and reflections on lessons learnt in the 50 years since the implementation of the Convention. A video of the online event is available on the Convention's YouTube page.
61. On 15 December the *Global Wetland Outlook 2021: Special Edition* was launched as part of the 50th Anniversary. In preparation for the launch, the [Global Wetlands Outlook](#) microsite was updated in line with the new document. A suite of communications materials related to the launch were also loaded to the site; these included a news story and press release, suggested

social media posts and key messages, and social media tiles. An op-ed piece by the Secretary General of the Convention was published on 20 December by the Thompson Reuters Foundation. Overall engagement and participation of various stakeholders in the campaign was strong. The social media analytics show 4,869 instances of the campaign hashtag being used on Twitter and Instagram posts with a reach of 32 million viewers across all regions. There were 40,000 page visits to the 50th Anniversary website. The highest volume of interaction with the campaign was from March to May; there was also a positive increase in engagement in October and December, in line with the International Youth Day activities and *Global Wetland Outlook 2021: Special Edition* launch.

62. The Wetland City Accreditation initiative continues to contribute to enhancing the visibility of wetlands and the Convention, including through the Convention's webpage that features the cities accredited at COP13. The Secretariat transmitted all received nominations for the current triennium to the Independent Advisory Committee for its review, which has been completed. The IAC has prepared a report and a draft resolution for consideration at SC59/2022 (document SC59/2022 Doc.22).
63. The Secretariat continues to participate in "Flotilla" meetings, a mechanism to coordinate communications and achieve communications synergies among a number of biodiversity and environmental agreements and organizations. A key activity of the Flotilla is the ability for organizations to share their communications plans and resources allowing other organizations to support their efforts. The Flotilla has played an important role in broadly disseminating the Convention's 50th Anniversary campaign resources, STRP products and supporting campaigns and broader messages promoting this milestone year for wetlands, climate and nature.
64. The Convention continues to focus its communications efforts on providing communications tools and assets for Parties and other organizations to use in order to leverage its limited capacities, for example in the context of World Wetlands Day, the Wetland City Accreditation scheme and the 50th Anniversary. To this end, it continues to engage with IOPs and other organizations such as the Flotilla with the capacity to raise visibility of wetlands and the Convention. At the same time, the Secretariat continues to build on the increased outreach enabled through social media and online events.

Strengthening the Secretariat's efficiency and effectiveness

65. The Secretariat continues to work towards strengthening its guiding objective 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. As mentioned above, the Secretariat has had to adapt its way of delivering its work in the current context.
66. Since the first signs of the pandemic, actions were taken to enable staff to quickly and effectively work from home. Previous efforts to strengthen IT infrastructure and train staff in the utilization of online tools allowed the Secretariat to work in a coordinated and effective manner despite working remotely. The Secretariat embraced new technologies to support the work of Contracting Parties including for their decision-making processes. Some highlights are provided below.
67. The management of finances and administration continues to be strengthened and adapted to new ways of working:

- i. The financial stability of the Secretariat remained solid in 2021 as in the prior year. In 2021 there was an increase in cash from CHF 5,634K in 2020 to CHF 6,946K in 2021. There was a decrease in Contracting Party net receivables from CHF 680K in 2020 to CHF 484K. Amounts owed to IUCN increased from CHF 61K in 2020 to CHF 135K in 2021 due to timing, while other payables increased from CHF 655K in 2020 to CHF 1,051K in 2021, mainly due to an increase in assessed contributions paid for future years by the Contracting Parties.
 - ii. As in the prior year, the financial audit was done remotely and the Secretariat successfully delivered all requested documentation and information required. No new financial issues have been raised by auditors since April 2020, when the financial audit of the year 2019 was completed and all issues raised in the past had been closed.
 - iii. Technologies and business practices continue to be developed to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the work of the Secretariat, such as the use of the CRM and Basecamp and DocuSign with implications on reducing the time spent by staff on administrative tasks (e.g. correspondence, registration, meeting organization), use of digital rather than paper documents, online signatures and electronic submission of documents and contracts, among others.
68. Work continued in ensuring that the capacity of staff meets the requirements of the key functions of the Secretariat as identified in the triennial and annual work plans approved by the Standing Committee. Talent management policies and procedures of IUCN were implemented, including on appraisals and promotions. During the reporting period five competitive recruitment processes were completed to fill the positions of Content Communications Officer, Capacity Development and Policy Officer, Junior Professional Technical Support – Africa, Scientific and Technical Officer and Human Resource Officer.
69. During the process of recruitment for vacant posts, efforts are being made to ensure that competencies align with the Secretariat’s functional requirements and that regional and gender diversity is achieved to the extent possible. Currently, 53% of Secretariat staff are female.
70. Attention has been paid to the challenges and opportunities resulting from working from home. Regular staff meetings have been held while working in these conditions to maintain internal communication and foster a sense of team and connectedness.
71. Capacity building of staff continued during the reporting period. Responding to the identification of wellbeing as a priority for staff in the context of the pandemic during the annual planning process, this issue was included in the Secretariat’s HR work plan for 2021 and 2022.
72. Building on a survey conducted in the previous period to measure the impact of the pandemic on staff, as a first response, staff were offered webinars developed by IUCN. The Secretariat went further by organizing an all-staff training workshop on improving resilience and wellbeing in January 2022.
73. The reporting period continued to be marked by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the resulting challenges, the team has worked hard with achievements in all areas of the Secretariat’s work plan as described in this report. The pandemic has also created opportunities to develop new ways of working including virtual means to increase the Secretariat’s reach and to build capacities of Contracting Parties. However, challenges remain especially related to restrictions

in office use, travel and face-to-face meetings particularly in light of preparing for SC59/2022 and COP14.

74. The Secretariat will continue to strengthen a whole-of-Secretariat approach, with the development of additional standard operating procedures (SOPs) that will contribute to making further progress in terms of operational coherence and efficiency. Some important challenges identified previously remain, including the legal status of the Secretariat as it relates to access to strategic global fora, signing of donor contracts and talent acquisition and retention. Other areas for further work include: continuing to develop more coherent and coordinated approaches across Secretariat teams to achieve efficiencies and better serve Contracting Parties across all regions; 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 thematic and regional approaches; and continuing to build the needed capabilities, capacities and skills in core functional areas of the Secretariat's work.