

Report and Decisions of the 59th Meeting of the Standing Committee

Friday 25 June 2021

13:00 – 16:00 Plenary Session of the Standing Committee

Agenda item 8: Financial and budgetary matters: Report of the Subgroup on Finance

1. The Chair of the Subgroup on Finance (Mexico) introduced the Subgroup's reports, contained in documents SC59 Com.1 and SC59 Com.2, thanking the Secretariat for its hard work and rapid responsiveness over the past ten months and also the other members of the Subgroup for their willingness to work constructively and flexibly under often difficult circumstances.
2. Further clarification was sought regarding the appearance of the term "other benefits" in the proposed budget for 2022, in Annex 2 to document SC59 Com.2. The Secretary General explained that these were various benefits, such as home leave and subsidies for travel on public transport, that formed part of IUCN's standard staff benefits. For presentation purposes the Secretariat had proposed including these in a single budget line, but the Subgroup on Finance had preferred that they be combined with salaries and social costs in a single budget line for each of the different operational units within the Secretariat. This change to the method of presentation had no financial implications.
3. In response to a question regarding the budget allocated to COP14 and in particular the funding needed to allow full participation of Contracting Parties at the COP, it was explained that the Convention's core budget did not make provision for funding of the COP. However, under Resolution XIII.2 *Financial and budgetary matters*, the Secretariat was mandated to treat COP14 sponsorship for eligible delegates as a high priority in its fundraising efforts.
4. It was suggested that to improve the value of reporting by Ramsar Regional Initiatives, the Standing Committee might consider adopting a template for financial reporting by RRI's which had been included as Annex 2 in document SC58 Doc.22.2 *Report of the Secretariat on the Ramsar Regional Initiatives*. The Secretariat explained that the Standing Committee had not prioritized this for consideration at either SC58 or the present meeting. The Standing Committee could, however, decide to consider this at a resumed session of the meeting.
5. Interventions were made by China, Dominican Republic, Japan, Finland, Mexico and Uruguay.

Decision SC59-24: The Standing Committee adopted Part I and Part II of the Report of the Subgroup on Finance without amendment.

Decision SC59-25: The Standing Committee noted with concern the challenges caused by the timing of the arrival of the audited financial statements, which results in the late delivery of finance-related documents and prevents compliance with Rule 10 of the Rules of Procedure, and requested the Secretary General to take the measures necessary to ensure that all non-audit-related financial documents, especially those that are related to requests for additional funds, are circulated in accordance with Rule 10 ahead of the meetings of the Subgroup of Finance in order to facilitate adequate and appropriate consideration of all budgetary matters.

Decision SC59-26: The Standing Committee:

- accepted the 2020 audited financial statements as of 31 December 2020;
- noted the core budget results for 2020;
- noted the non-core balances and voluntary contributions for 2020; and
- noted the unspent/uncommitted balances that are carried forward from 2020 to 2021, as described in paragraph 20 of document SC59 Doc.8.1.

Decision SC59-27: The Standing Committee:

- approved and noted the proposed adjustments to the COP13 approved core budget, as described in paragraphs 35 and 36 of document SC59 Doc.8.1 and presented in column E of the table in Annex 4 of the same document; and
- approved the presentation of the “other benefits” within the merged budget line “salaries, social costs and other benefits” for each budget area in the future budgets, recognizing that this change in location of the funding between budget lines does not reflect a change to funding levels.

Decision SC59-28: The Standing Committee approved the allocation of CHF 72,000 from savings from the 2020 core budget to accommodate the increase of provisions for outstanding contributions in the 2021 budget.

Decision SC59-29: The Standing Committee approved the following uses of 2020 core budget savings, described in document SC59 Doc.8.1 paragraph 42:

For 2021:

- CHF 25,000 for the development and production of World Wetlands Day 2022 resources;
- CHF 86,000 for improvements to the Convention’s website.

For 2022:

- CHF 76,000 to cover the core budget gap for core activities of the Secretariat for 2022 (subject to approval of the 2022 budget by the extraordinary COP);

Decision SC59-30: The Standing Committee:

- took note of the status of annual contributions;
- noted the actions listed in paragraphs 14 and 15 of document SC59 Doc.8.2 on group confirmation of outstanding contributions as part of the audit process;
- noted the actions listed in paragraphs 17, 19, 20 and 21 to continue encouraging the payment of annual contributions;
- noted the change in annual contributions receivable and in the annual provision against contributions receivable; and
- noted the status of the African voluntary contributions.

Decision SC59-31: The Standing Committee:

- i. took note of the contents of document SC59 doc.8.3;

- ii. requested the Secretariat to prepare a one-year budget for 2022 for approval by the extraordinary COP based on budget Scenario A at 0% increase presented by the Secretariat; and
- iii. requested the Secretariat to prepare a draft resolution on the budget for approval by the extraordinary COP.

Decision SC59-32: The Standing Committee approved the allocation of CHF 90,000 from savings from the 2020 core budget for the work of the Working Group on the Review of the Strategic Plan, in accordance with Decision SC59-20 by the Standing Committee to establish a new Working Group.

Decision SC59-33: The Standing Committee approved the allocation of CHF 25,000 to each of the four eligible RRIIs for their activities in 2021 from the core budget line D “Support to Regional Initiatives”, provided that receiving RRIIs conform to sub-paragraph 8.d. of Resolution XIII.9.

Decision SC59-34: The Standing Committee decided that any request for core funds by RRIIs should include a rationale about how they support Contracting Parties in implementing the Convention and its Resolutions and guidance, and that requests must be provided in English or with an English translation (with informal “google translate” translations, screened by the country’s national focal point, acceptable), to enable the Subgroup of Finance to make informed decisions in a timely manner.

Decision SC59-35: The Standing Committee approved, pending confirmation that the funds would be spent in alignment with paragraph 8 of Resolution XIII.9, the remaining budgeted allocation of CHF 10,000 from the original proposal in 2020 of CHF 25,000 to two of the four eligible Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RRIIs) in the context of Decision SC58-28, for their activities planned in 2020 but delayed to 2021 and for disbursement in 2021, from the 2020 core budget savings, taking into account the current exceptional circumstances of the global pandemic. The two RRIIs are the Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Senegal River Basin (SenegalWet) and the Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Amazon River Basin, and the allocations are made provided that receiving RRIIs conform to sub-paragraph 8.d. of Resolution XIII.9 and other relevant rules and regulations related to reporting on use of core funds.

Agenda item 27: Dates and venues of the 60th and 61st meetings of the Standing Committee

- 6. The Secretariat noted that the Standing Committee had decided (Decision SC59-13) that the present meeting would take place in two parts, with the second part to be held in 2022. Taking into account other meetings, it had identified two possible periods for this: 23-27 May and 20-24 June.
- 7. General support was expressed for the earlier of the two periods, although it was noted that the earlier dates clashed with a meeting of the Global Environment Facility. It was agreed that, given the large anticipated agenda for the next Standing Committee session, it would be desirable to retain the possibility of having two extra days (28 and 29 May) for the meeting if they are identified as necessary once the provisional agenda has been finalized.
- 8. There followed a lengthy discussion, focusing on the status of existing draft resolutions and whether it would be desirable or possible under the Rules of Procedure for Contracting Parties to submit new draft resolutions given that, under Rule 5.1, draft resolutions should have been submitted 60 days before the start of the current meeting if they are to be considered by COP14. It was noted that some existing draft resolutions contain time-sensitive components

that would need to be revised in light of the postponement of COP14, and that some Working Groups had not yet completed their work, including preparation of draft resolutions mandated by the COP.

9. Clarification was sought of Post-SC58 Intersessional Decision 11 concerning SC59 and the communication to Contracting Parties of a possible new timeline for the submission of draft resolutions for consideration by COP14.
10. To allow Contracting Parties to submit new draft resolutions if they so wished it was suggested that the next Standing Committee session be divided in two (SC59 part 2 and SC60), but some Parties believed that this would set an undesired and potentially confusing precedent. It was also noted that, the Standing Committee having already decided that it would resume SC59 in 2022, the Standing Committee would need to reopen this decision in accordance with Rule 37 if it wished to modify this.
11. In further discussion the Standing Committee decided that those Contracting Parties that had submitted draft resolutions in accordance with the deadline for the present meeting would be able to submit revisions of these no later than 60 days before the resumed SC59 in 2022. Those Working Groups that had not yet submitted draft resolutions in accordance with their mandates could also do so by this deadline. At the suggestion of a Party, the Secretariat would seek advice from its Legal Advisor on whether Contracting Parties could submit new draft resolutions within this timeframe and on whether it was possible for the Standing Committee to hold the second part of its 59th meeting and its 60th meeting back-to-back. The Secretariat would transmit this information to Contracting Parties for further consideration.
12. Interventions were made by France, Japan, Republic of Korea, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America.

Decision SC59-36: The Standing Committee decided that the resumed session of its 59th meeting would take place between 23 May and 27 May 2022, with the possibility of extending the session on 28 and 29 May if required once the provisional agenda had been finalized. Those Contracting Parties that had submitted draft resolutions for the present meeting could submit revised versions by 24 March 2022. Working Groups whose mandate included submission of draft resolutions for consideration by COP14 could also submit draft resolutions by 24 March 2022.

Decision SC59-37: The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to seek legal advice on whether, under the current Rules of Procedure, Contracting Parties could submit new draft resolutions by 24 March 2022 for consideration by COP14, and whether it was possible for the Standing Committee to hold the second part of its 59th meeting and its 60th meeting back-to-back.

Agenda item 28: Adoption of the report of the meeting

13. The Secretariat noted that revised versions of the reports of the first two days of the meeting, taking into account comments received, were available on the website.
14. The Chair of the Standing Committee asked Committee members to submit comments on the report of the third day, which had been published, and that of the fourth day which they would receive by e-mail.
15. Interventions were made by Dominican Republic, France and Sweden.

Decision SC59-38: The Standing Committee adopted the reports of the first and second days of the meeting, and instructed the Secretariat to share the report of the fourth day with the Committee, and revise the reports of the third and fourth days in accordance with the comments received.

Agenda item 29: Any other business

16. One participant expressed concern regarding Ramsar Regional Initiatives, questioning why the endorsement of one would now be delayed to 2022 and why the other had been assessed by the Secretariat as not meeting the criteria for endorsement.
17. Argentina stated that on 18 June 2021 its Permanent Mission in Geneva had presented a note to the Secretariat regarding the most recent update of the Ramsar List and asking that this be recorded.
18. An oral statement on the Second Consultation Workshop of Biodiversity-related Conventions on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (Bern II), convened remotely between 18 January and 2 February 2021, was read out and is included as Annex xx to the present report.
19. Interventions were made by Argentina, European Union, Sweden, Switzerland and Youth Engaged in Wetlands.

Agenda item 30: Closing remarks

20. The Chair of the Standing Committee suspended the meeting.