

Agenda item 3

Report of the Secretary General

Action requested: The Standing Committee is invited to receive the Secretary General's report and advise as appropriate.

Note: The Secretary General's report also serves as a review of the implementation of the Secretariat's Work Plan for 2007.

1. This report covers the period since the 35th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC35), in February 2007, but the analysis of some global issues is beyond this time frame. At present the Convention has 157 Contracting Parties, with 1,708 wetland sites, totaling 153 million hectares, designated for inclusion in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. Therefore, the level of activity demanded of the Secretariat continues to increase, as the number of Contracting Parties increases and new challenges are emerging from global debate.
2. The Ramsar Secretariat has to take into account the changing environment in which the Convention has to operate. One of the requirements to ensure the success of the Convention's work is to have the necessary understanding of the state and trends of wetlands in each country, including existing values, threats and opportunities regarding the major types of wetlands. Thus it is necessary to obtain updated reliable information that supports decision-making and enhances the commitment of Contracting Parties to take the right actions at the right time.
3. In response to this requirement, the Secretariat is working closely with the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) to strengthen partnerships with relevant organizations to gain access to existing sources of reliable data and to tap into these sources. The involvement of the Ramsar Secretariat in the UN-Water process is an opportunity to benefit from information about the identification of gaps and the definition of indicators to fill these gaps, because the work that is underway through the UN-Water process is taking relevant actions regarding these issues. The involvement of the Ramsar Secretariat in the UN Environmental Management Group (EMG) is another opportunity to get additional source of information.
4. However, our working relationships with the EMG and UN-Water are not sufficient to fill the gaps, although the UN-Water has a Task Force preparing a formal monitoring system for Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) to provide a report on national IWRM progress for the 16th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD16). Therefore, the Secretariat needs to seek additional sources of information to promote an effective recognition of the tangible values of wetlands by relevant organizations and to stimulate interest and concern for wetland issues through exchanges of persuasive facts about:

- o wetlands and biodiversity conservation and sustainable use
 - o wetlands and water supply
 - o wetlands and food security
 - o wetlands and human health
 - o wetlands and poverty reduction
 - o wetlands and energy/extractive industries
 - o wetlands and tourism
 - o wetlands and urban development
 - o wetlands and protected areas.
5. In this spirit, our reporting system should encompass not only the work of the Administrative Authorities but also the important contribution of key players in land use, water management, biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, desertification control, climate change mitigation and adaptation, agriculture, sanitation, and rural/urban development.
 6. To that end, the assistance of the Secretariat to Contracting Parties is done with the aim of enhancing collaboration with key organizations with a stake in wetlands, water, biodiversity, land use, and climate change. At local and national levels we will support the involvement of those who are affected by and interested in wetland conservation and wise use but also those who are affected, but not interested, and those who are not affected, but interested.

Goal 1: Wise use of wetlands

7. Since wetland conservation and wise use cannot be achieved by a single organization, one of the key conditions to achieve the wise use of all wetlands is to work with various partners. To have effective and successful relationships with various partners, however, it is essential to share the same understanding of “*what we call wetlands?*”. Unfortunately, many players talking about wetlands have their own definitions of the word. As a result, many organizations fail to recognize the importance of wetlands for sustainable development because they employ a restricted definition that underrates the values and the services provided by these diverse ecosystems. Unfortunately, even with some of our International Organization Partners we may have divergent views about the definition of wetlands and divergent description of wetland ecosystems in a given country. It is worth noting, for instance, that the report made by IWMI on “*Water for food, Water for life*” does not consider rivers and lakes as wetland areas. Likewise, many WWF experts consider that coastal areas and forests that are associated with water bodies/courses are not wetland ecosystems. Similarly, the “*Global Environment Outlook, GEO4, Environment for development*” prepared by UNEP in collaboration with 54 organizations, including IUCN, has a description of wetlands that excludes some important wetlands types in the assessment of the status and trends of the Environment 1987-2007. As a result, importance of wetlands for sustainable use is underrated.
8. Many agencies, in fact, restrict wetland ecosystems to marshes and swamps. With this restricted definition wetlands, it is more difficult to consider wetlands as key assets for sustainable development, and this is why the Secretariat is undertaking the development of better contacts with a diversity of organizations in order to highlight the meaning of wetlands and to ensure that the Ramsar mission and objectives are understood by key

players. In this regard, the Ramsar regional meetings in preparation for COP10 are being used as an opportunity to meet with key organizations, even if they are not themselves attending our meetings.

9. The Ramsar Secretariat is also undertaking better contacts with regions to receive up-to-date feedback of conservation threats and issues at local, national and regional levels. One important step taken by the Secretariat is to cooperate with specialized organizations that are able to exploit new tools, such as remote sensing technologies, to identify problems, threats, and trends. In this regard, the Secretariat is exploring a potential partnership with some organizations such as UN GEO (Group on Earth Observation). GEO is assisting countries to gain a better understanding of protected areas, including Ramsar sites, to recognize their conservation value, their actual degree of protection, or their role in a larger network of protected and unprotected areas. Recognizing that these areas are managed by a very broad range of organizations, with different objectives, resources, capacity, and thematic and geographical foci, GEO is well positioned to assist us in reaching some organizations.
10. GEO is coordinating, facilitating, and encouraging the use of Earth observations for protected areas planning, characterization, mapping, and monitoring, to predict how these areas will be affected by change. Further, the programme will support the delineation and update of protected area boundaries; improve dissemination of Earth observation data and information to protected area planners and managers; and increase data and information sharing. Because many of the same techniques can be applied to areas lacking official protection, tools and approaches will be widely shared. A representative of GEO will be participating in one of the STRP14's working group sessions.
11. The most challenging endeavor is to make sure that the Ramsar Contracting Parties are aware of the available information in order to use it to manage wetland in a sustainable way.
12. The Ramsar Secretary General takes the opportunity whenever it is presented to approach key organizations during his visits to Contracting Parties. The regional meetings in preparation of COP10 have been used to meet with many potential partners. It is worth noting that some remarkable processes and actions that are carried out at local, national and regional levels may inspire significant constructive steps to take to enhance wetland conservation and wise use at national and global levels.
13. As a result of the visit of the Secretary General in Bangkok, Thailand, the Secretariat is aware of a most significant process in Asia and the Pacific called "*Green Growth*". In the Asia and Pacific region, facing ever increasing demands for food, water, shelter, sanitation, energy, health services and economic and human security, the governments have unanimously agreed to respond to these challenges through the promising path of environmentally sustainable economic growth, or "Green Growth". The Secretariat believes that the most challenging action by the Ramsar Contracting Parties in Asia and the Pacific is to integrate wetland issues into "Green Growth" as a policy focus and powerful strategy to promote "win-win" approaches to reconciling the conflicts between current pathways for the achievements of important Millenium Development Goals: MDG 1 (on poverty reduction) and MDG 7 (on environmental sustainability).

14. The Ramsar Administrative Authorities must enhance partnerships at local, regional and national levels to work with key organizations and agencies to highlight the importance of the ecosystem services provided by wetlands. The Secretariat is establishing close working relationships with the UN Economic and Social Commission in Asia and the Pacific, which is the catalyst for a conducive environment for Green Growth through developing the conceptual and analytical framework and by providing capacity building to the government.
15. Another promising process is the Mangrove for the Future (MFF) initiative, a partnership for coastal conservation after tsunamis intended to restore and sustain livelihoods. This is underway with IUCN and UNDP as major partners. Former USA President Bill Clinton, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery, was in Phuket, Thailand in December 2006 to view progress on livelihoods and to launch the MFF. Following the visit of the Secretary General to UN agencies in Bangkok, the Ramsar Secretariat is pleased to report that the MFF strategy and action plan, which aims to restore and conserve all coastal ecosystems, are promising processes. These strategies and action plan use wetlands as key landscape assets for conservation and development in six Indian Ocean countries: India, Indonesia, Maldives, Thailand, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka.
16. In addition, the UNDP-UNEP Poverty-Environment Initiative (PEI) is underway as a joint programme to provide financial and technical support to countries to build capacity for mainstreaming poverty-environment linkages into national development planning processes, such as PRSPs and MDG Achievement Strategies. Based upon experience over the past few years in assisting nine countries in Africa and Asia to launch sustainable programmes to mainstream poverty-environment into national development plans, budget processes and sector implementation programmes, UNDP and UNEP have launched an effort to scale-up the PEI significantly and to work closely with key donors and other partners to expand the effort to other countries and regions. In Asia, partner countries include: Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, and Viet Nam, with programmes being developed in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Papua New Guinea.
17. Regarding Africa, the UNDP-UNEP Poverty-Environment Initiative currently has seven country poverty-environment mainstreaming programmes in Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. An increased number of country programmes will be supported by joint UNDP-UNEP regional teams and by the headquarters of the two organizations.
18. These initiatives are important opportunities for the Ramsar Contracting Parties to promote the conservation and sustainable use of the vital services provided by wetland ecosystems. The Ramsar Administrative Authorities in relevant countries are urged to take part in these processes and to use the Ramsar tools to support these promising initiatives.
19. In Asia, significant ongoing programmes and projects that aim at securing sustainable livelihoods through wise use of wetlands include the Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP). This is a \$30 million initiative working in the four Lower Mekong countries – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam. It is a joint UNDP/IUCN /Mekong River Commission (MRC) managed programme, running in parallel but closely coordinated with the MRC structures and decision-making processes. It is encouraging to learn that this programme has adopted the Ramsar Convention definition of wetlands for the purpose of its work and objectives. It is

important to ensure that all relevant Ramsar Administrative Authorities are providing continued input through the use of Ramsar materials.

20. Another important framework for wetland conservation and wise use in Asia is the GEF-sponsored Wetland Conservation Initiative in Pakistan (see more information on partnership with GEF in paragraphs 84-85 below). The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) is sponsoring a second cycle 2005-2010 of the so-called “Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment” that will be instrumental in enhancing the capacity of local governments in Asia and the Pacific. This is carried out to promote integrated win-win approaches in urban environmental management and the encouragement of socio-economic livelihoods at the local level. This initiative is relevant to the Ramsar COP10 theme “*Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People*”, and it also promote our inspiration to build win-win interactions between wetlands and urban development.
21. The issues of water, the environment, climate change, livelihoods and poverty reduction are being analyzed to enhance sustainable mountain development as well. The role of high-altitude wetlands is increasingly perceived as of vital value for people. A recent publication by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) highlights the mountain perspective as an emerging element in international development. According to ICIMOD, the Himalayan environment alone supports 1.5 billion people and the global environment through environmental services. This environment is under constant stress as a result of environmental degradation and climate change. It is worth noting that according to ICIMOD, in a recent publication of June 2000, the Himalayas have the largest concentration of glaciers outside the polar region. These glaciers are special wetlands with a freshwater reserve that provides the headwaters for nine major river systems in Asia – a life-line for almost one third of humanity. The Ramsar Convention therefore faces the challenge of working closely and effectively with the organizations caring for this important part of the world’s wetlands.
22. A recent work by Wetlands International and the Global Environment Center, supported by the GEF through UNEP, has shown the important role of peatlands as a special type of wetlands that is an important long-term carbon store in the terrestrial biosphere. The message of the Ramsar Secretary General to the UNFCCC 13th Conference of the Parties in Bali, Indonesia, stressed the need to build partnership with all relevant organizations to ensure the conservation and wise use of peatlands. Many events were organized in Bali to draw attention to peatlands and their role in climate change mitigation and adaptation – UNEP, the CBD Secretariat, Wetlands International, and the Ramsar Secretariat collaborated in carrying out these events.
23. In the Americas, eight countries (Bahamas, Costa Rica, Colombia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Trinidad and Tobago, and the USA) have National Wetland Policies. In this region, 15 Contracting Parties have existing national committees that have taken on the role of National Ramsar Committees.
24. In Africa, since the last Standing Committee meeting, the principle of wise use has been applied in different ways throughout the region. The Secretariat was involved in the preparation and/or the review of National Wetland Policies of the following countries: Congo (outline of the NWP), Burkina Faso (preparation of the terms of reference to elaborate the NWP), review of the draft NWPs of Botswana, Kenya and Tanzania, and

- preparation of the draft NWP of Nigeria. Our collaboration with Benin led to the adoption by the government of the national wetlands strategy in June 2007. Cameroon has also embarked on a national and participatory consultation process to elaborate its NWP with technical support from the Secretariat. The outstanding example is Ghana, where we provided funding and technical assistance to turn the NWP into an action plan (including a budget) with emphasis on poverty reduction.
25. We have also initiated the preparation of a rapid wetland inventory of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in order to elaborate a national wetlands policy. This project, which does not yet have enough funding, is taking advantage of earth observation technologies and other GIS tools to have a national coverage of the inventory. In 2008, the Secretariat's Africa team will liaise with Contracting Parties to revisit the concept of NWPs and discuss how the existing ones can be better included in the national development process, and will produce another framework for the preparation of new ones based on the Ghana example.
 26. The Secretariat participated in a November 2007 Geneva Environment Network round-table on "paying nature for services rendered – the case of water", together with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Water Convention, IUCN, Oxford University, and Nestlé Waters. The discussions addressed payment schemes for natural purification of water carried out by wetlands, forests and soil, as well as other wetland ecosystem services provided to improve water quality through filtrations, flood prevention, run-off regulation, erosion reduction and lowering the risk of land-slides. This was followed by a working meeting convened by Switzerland to elaborate a preliminary concept for a possible seminar on payments for water-related ecosystem services during the Stockholm World Water Week 2008. Both were a follow-up to the Secretariat's involvement in the drafting group to prepare "Recommendations on payments for ecosystem services in integrated water resources management", adopted by the parties to the UNECE Water Convention in 2006.
 27. The Czech Republic, together with the national UNESCO MaB Committee and the UNESCO IHP European centre for eco-hydrology, organized in Trebon in June 2007 an International Course on Eco-hydrological Approaches to Wise Use, Restoration, Management and Conservation of Wetlands. An international Ural river basin management workshop took place in Orenburg, Russian Federation, with a large Kazakh participation to prepare for integrated management of the river and floodplains of the last mostly natural river with migrating sturgeon population in the Caspian Sea basin. The Danube Commission's expert group on River Basin Management met for its 24th time in October in Vienna, addressing the progress with the Danube river basin management plan and plans for major sub-basins such as the Tizza and Sava (with their own management commissions) within the framework of the European Union Water Framework Directive. This was also the occasion to visit the new, state-of-the-art fish pass at the Freudenu hydrological power station on the Danube downstream of Vienna.
 28. Fiji, Marshall Islands, Palau and Samoa have completed their National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs). The NBSAPs include provisions for the conservation and sustainable use of coral reefs and mangroves, the critical wetland ecosystems of the Pacific Islands. One major consideration (and a potential challenge) is to ensure that these strategies are implemented and reviewed periodically. SPREP, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program, is currently providing support to Pacific Island countries

for the implementation of their NBSAPs. The interaction of the NBSAP implementers and Ramsar is an issue to discuss as an action under the Joint Programme of Work with the CBD and with the Biodiversity Liaison Group.

29. The outposted Associate Ramsar Officer, based at SPREP in Samoa, who functions as an Assistant Regional Advisor to the Senior Regional Advisor (SRA) in the Ramsar Secretariat, is continuing to provide advice and assistance to Pacific Island Contracting Parties (Fiji, Marshall Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa), including the consideration of wetland policy development, the integration of Ramsar objectives into national strategies/policies where appropriate, site management needs, and establishment arrangements and support for National Ramsar Committees (NRCs).
30. It is encouraging to note that all five Pacific Island Contracting Parties have existing national committees that have taken on the role of NRCs. Such committees have been established through other projects such as the UNDP-GEF Biodiversity Enabling Activities to assist Pacific Island Country parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to meet their obligations under the CBD. The Ramsar Secretariat urges the Contracting Parties in Oceania to make the best use of their National Ramsar Committees to integrate wetland conservation and wise use into their national planning processes and to use the Ramsar tools to ensure that the Ramsar mission is part of the priorities in their countries and in the subregion.
31. The Ramsar Regional Meeting in Asia held in Bangkok, Thailand (January 2008), proposed the following means and approaches to enhancing the wise use of wetlands:
 - Use existing collaborative mechanisms (e.g., regional treaties and agreements) to promote the concept of the wise use of wetlands.
 - Develop and apply new tools and approaches, such as the “payment for ecosystem services”.
 - Share information and experience.
 - Enhance wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring.
 - Enhance CEPA actions.
 - Promote restoration and rehabilitation.
 - Monitor and control the spread of alien species in wetlands.
 - Provide positive incentives for wise use.
 - Enhance the involvement of the private sector.

Goal 2: Wetlands of International Importance

New Ramsar site designations

32. Since the 35th meeting of the Standing Committee (February 2007),
 - 4 new sites from 3 countries in the Americas have been included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance: in Guatemala (1), in Mexico (2), and in Peru (1). 49 new Ramsar sites are in process of designation in the region.

- 41 new African Ramsar sites, representing a total surface area of 12,899,786 hectares, were added to the list of Wetlands of International Importance. These include: Benin (2), Republic of Congo(4), Gabon (3), Gambia (1), Guinea (2), Madagascar (1), South Africa (2), Togo (2), Tunisia (19) and Zambia (5). See the table below for more details. Presently 58 new designations and 24 RIS updates are in the pipeline. The Senior Advisor for Africa, Mr. Bamba, officially handed over the certificates for the designation of the 19 new sites in Tunis, Tunisia.
 - 9 new sites have been designated from Asia: Iraq (1), Kazakhstan (1), Nepal (4), Republic of Korea (2), and United Arab Emirates (1). 8 more RISs have been received from China (6 sites), Republic of Korea (1) and Thailand (1).
33. A very promising stakeholder committee was set up by the manager of the Croatian Ramsar site (RS) Lonjsko Polje Nature Park for the Central Posavina floodplain region along the Sava river, and it met for the first time in March 2007. This region goes way beyond the borders of the Ramsar site and Nature Park and contains major temporarily inundated pasture areas and oak woods providing several resources for the local economy, including an increasing rural tourism.
34. The Camargue Ramsar site and Regional Nature Park in France, after a long period with its legal entity being challenged in court, was finally reconfirmed as a management structure with a new legal status by the French government at the end of 2007 and can now look again towards a brighter future. It is currently, among many other issues, addressing the issue of mosquito control in large wetland areas and its compatibility with biodiversity conservation, also in the context of new disease vectors spreading through Mediterranean wetland areas (e.g., Chicungunya and West Nile viruses).
35. Mar Menor Ramsar site in Spain (Murcia Region) has now set up a management committee which met for the first time on 19 November – the Ramsar Secretariat participated, looking at a first, very comprehensive action programme for its ecological rehabilitation and sustainable development planning in the water catchment of this largest Mediterranean lagoon in Spain.

Threats to Ramsar sites and the Montreux Record

36. During 2007 the Secretariat followed up several complaints received during 2006 regarding threats to Ramsar sites in the Americas:
- Argentina: Bahía Samborombón: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent the Ramsar Secretariat a complete report informing about the measures taken.
- Belize: Sarstoon Temash National Park: Several letters requesting further information were sent to the Prime Minister in 2006 and 2007. To date the Secretariat has not received a response.
- Honduras: On 5 June 2006 the Secretariat received a complaint regarding a tourism development project potentially affecting Ramsar sites Parque Nacional Jeanette Kawas and Refugio de Vida Silvestre Punta Izopo. The Secretariat sent a letter on 19 June 2006 to the

Administrative Authority requesting further information and visited Parque Nacional Jeanette Kawas in September 2007. To date the Secretariat has not received a report.

Uruguay: On 14 July 2006, the Secretariat received an information request regarding the potential threat posed to Ramsar site Estero de Farrapos e Islas del Río Uruguay, as a result of the operation of two paper pulp factories.

37. Pursuant to Resolution IX.15, paragraph 24, the Secretariat requested Contracting Parties in the Americas with sites listed in the Montreux Record to provide updates on their progress in taking action to address the issues for which the sites were listed. To date the Secretariat has received information about progress made in Llanquanelo, Argentina, and Costa Rica: Ramsar site Palo Verde. Regarding Ramsar site Bañados del Este y Franja Costera, Uruguay has informed the Secretariat that they are working on the removal of Bañados del Este from the Montreux Record. To date the Secretariat has not received information about progress made in Guatemala concerning the Ramsar site Laguna del Tigre and in USA for the Everglades
38. Paragraph 27 item viii) of the same Resolution also requested the government of Chile to evaluate the possibility of including the Carlos Anwandter Sanctuary Ramsar site in the Montreux Record, in accordance with Article 8.2 (e) of the Convention text. This site was successfully included in the Montreux Record on 6 October 2006. In the framework of the agreement with CONAF some measures are being developed for the restoration of the site.
39. Bolivia has informed the Secretariat that it is concerned about possible threats to Lagos Poopó and Uru Uru and the authorities are considering its inclusion in the Montreux Record in the near future. To date the Secretariat has not received further information about the site.
40. In general most of the threats to Ramsar sites in the Americas are caused by infrastructure projects (ports and pipeline), as well as urban and tourism projects, and the main challenge for the Contracting Parties is the maintenance of the ecological character of the Ramsar sites under development pressures.
41. In 2007, several NGOs, international organizations and other organizations sent complaints/reports to the Secretariat regarding threats to Ramsar sites in Africa. The following countries and sites were concerned:

Algeria: On 18 June 2007 the Secretariat received complaints of threats to El-Kala National Park (which includes the Ramsar sites Réserve intégrale du Lac El Mellah, Réserve Intégrale du Lac Oubeïra, and Réserve Intégrale du Lac Tonga. This concerned the construction of a 20km by 200m highway passing through the central part of the national park with negative impacts on the ecological character of the site. On 4 July 2007 the Secretariat sent a letter to the head of the Administrative Authority with a copy to the Algerian permanent mission in Geneva, asking for more information on this issue and urging them to keep the Ramsar Secretariat informed about the evolution of the problem.

Democratic Republic of Congo: Complaints were sent on the 5th and 12th of September 2007 concerning the Ramsar site Parc national des Virunga. These concerned the adverse effects of fighting on both the environment (especially the gorillas) and the inhabitants (locals and tourists), with threats of possible encroachment of displaced people on the national park. Meanwhile WWF was working closely with UNHCR (the UN's refugee

agency) and ICCN (Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature) to find solutions to the problem, and the Ramsar Secretariat could not do much as the problem was greatly political (greatly influenced by the fighting in Rwanda and the DRC). The Secretariat will however prepare a letter of encouragement to the government of DRC.

Kenya: Complaints were received on 8 January 2007 on the possible negative effects from two proposed sugar plantations (by Mumias Sugar Ltd / TARD A–24,000 ha and Mat International–30,000 ha) on the Tana Delta Wetlands, a non-Ramsar site. However, the Secretariat requested further information from the informant before contacting the Ministry of Environment (1 March 07). After numerous reminders, the Kenya Administrative Authority finally responded on 07 September 2007 informing us of the new person in charge of Ramsar issues at the AA (Dr. Kasiki) and promising follow-up. Another letter from the Kenya AA (14 September 2007) confirmed the validity of the threats to the Tana Delta and other Kenya Ramsar sites and mentioned their involvement in consultations with various stakeholders (NEMA, EAC, Tanzania government). The AA called a national consultative meeting in which it was decided that a Ramsar Advisory Mission/Montreux Record listing should be conducted in the country to assess the situation for the two sites. On 5 July 2007, the letter to the Tanzania AA on threats to the Lake Natron Basin Ramsar site was forwarded to the Kenya AA, as a large part of the lake's basin is located in Kenya. The AA responded (27 July 2007) to say that they were following up the issue, will welcome advice from Ramsar, and have started consultations with the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) and the diplomatic missions of the East African Community. They promised to keep Ramsar informed on progress made.

Mauritania: On 2 April 2007 complaints were received concerning Chat T'boul on the existence of exploratory oil drilling within or close to this Ramsar site, with major impacts on the breeding habitat for the near-threatened Lesser Flamingo. Equally, dumping of waste water and debris from the drilling activity into nearby catchments posed possible negative impacts on the ecosystems. A letter was sent to the Minister of the Ministère du Développement Rural, de l'Hydraulique et De Environnement, Mauritanie (25 June 2007), informing them and asking for further information and an update on the situation.

Morocco: On 25 April 2007 complaints were received for Ramsar site Embouchure de la Moulouya on the construction of a new road by the Moroccan authorities, risking complete deterioration of the site, in addition to the construction of the mega-tourism and construction project FADESA beside the site. The informant was emailed (17 May 2007) with information previously received from the MedWet secretariat and Administrative Authority in Morocco concerning their work on the same problem, and the informant was advised to work together with the Ramsar AA. The Secretariat learned from the government of Morocco that the situation was under control and that they did not need support from the Secretariat to handle the issue. This was reiterated at the Africa regional preparatory meeting in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in November 2007.

South Africa: On 12 February 2007, complaints were received on threats to the Orange River Basin (including Ramsar site Orange River Mouth). This concerned the fact that 60% of basin was in the hands of BHP Billiton, which is drilling for oil. On 14 December 2007, complaints were received for the Langebaan Ramsar site on threats from the planned expansion of the Saldanha Iron-ore Port, which aimed at tripling the current capacity of their iron ore handling facilities (45-93 million tonnes/year) along with associated facilities (by Transnet, a state-owned enterprise under the National Department

of Public Enterprises). There are equally great concerns about the negative impact of dredging on the already burdened Langebaan and the lack of an effective oil spill contingency plan on the part of the National Port Authority to deal with oil spills in Langebaan Lagoon. This has yet to be resolved.

Sudan: On 18 June 2007 complaints were received concerning the Sudd Ramsar site, relating to possible threats as a result of oil exploration taking place there. Inquiries were directed to the informant in order to determine what steps to take next and linking him with the Ramsar Administrative Authority in Sudan for further discussion of the problem.

Tunisia: In March 2007 a complaint was received about the Tunisian government's intentions concerning a decontamination and rehabilitation project in Tunisia (TARURA), north of the coastline in the city of Sfax, with plans to dig off sea grass within some proposed Ramsar sites. The exact site(s) were not specified. The informant was advised to contact the Ramsar AA in Tunisia to try approaching the situation at the country level and to re-contact Ramsar in the case where this does not prove fruitful.

Tanzania: On 25 April 2007, an inquiry was received on Ramsar site Lake Natron Basin. The correspondent wanted to know the constraints/implications of the development of an ecological tourist hotel lodge within the environs of Ramsar site. An e-mail was sent advising to contact the Tanzanian Administrative Authority for more information on the National Environmental Policy. The Tanzania AA was informed on 30 May 2007 of this complaint. In June and July 2007 information was received about possible ecological threats from the development by TATA Chemicals of a soda ash extraction facility at Lake Natron Basin, along with associated infrastructure such as access roads, a power plant, railroad, pipeline to carry soda slurry across the lake, and habitation facilities for construction workers and their families. This will involve possible negative impacts and implications for the ecological character of this site and its environs, especially the major catchments located in neighboring Kenya. The Secretariat contacted the AA on 4 July 2007 informing them about the reports, asking for further information, encouraging cooperation with the National Environmental Management Council, and requesting for update on the situation. After many reminders, a response was finally received from the Minister of Natural Resources and Tourism (on 24 September 2007 but dated back to 30th August 2007), briefing the Secretariat on the history of the problem and the ESIA carried out, and welcoming the technical assistance offered through a proposed Ramsar Advisory Mission. Paul Mafabi (chair of the Ramsar Standing Committee) attended the consultative meeting on 12 July 2007 to discuss EIA and SIA for the proposed soda ash development. The Secretariat has drafted the ToR for such a RAM mission and passed them on to the AA on 21 December 2007 for review and approval of the proposed dates for the mission. We are awaiting the green light from the government to proceed with the mission during the last week of January 2008.

Zambia: On 27 August 2007 complaints were received about Ramsar site Bangweulu Swamps on threats from uncontrolled fishing and inflated hunting of the species in the site and the need to incorporate the local population in conservation and development projects. Reply sent on 23 August 2007 advising the informant to work together with the Ramsar AA (ZAWA) towards wetlands conservation in Zambia. On 21 September 2007 the Secretariat received complaints on Kasanka National Park (which is very close to the boundary of Bangweulu Swamps Ramsar site) concerning possible threats from the proposed introduction of Black lechwe into this park by the Kasanka Trust and ZAWA.

This could be a threat as there have been no past records of a breeding population of this species in the park, and because there is no park management plan and specific EIA before this action.

42. Over the past year, there has been no change in the status of African Ramsar sites included in the Montreux record. There are therefore still 12 African sites from eight Contracting Parties presently listed in the Record (http://www.ramsar.org/key_montreux_record.htm).
43. Algeria sent a request on 14 February 2007 for removal of their two Ramsar sites from the Montreux Record as the threats to these sites have been overcome. This is presently being studied by the STRP. Egypt requested assistance from the Secretariat with removing their two Ramsar sites from the Record as their past efforts to do so failed, despite the availability of necessary information. They were informed of the standard procedure for removal of Record sites and advised to follow it.
44. For Asia, currently, there are 12 sites from five Contracting Parties (Azerbaijan 1, India 2, Islamic Republic of Iran 7, Jordan 1, and Kyrgyz Republic 1) that are included in the Montreux Record. Four out of the five Parties have been taking action to address the issues of the sites. Positive development news have been received of the two sites in India, one site from Iran, and one site in the Kyrgyz Republic, but none of them has officially requested removal from the Montreux Record. The Republic of Korea has not yet advised the Secretariat of the current situation concerning the sea-wall construction and reclamation of the Saemangeum coastal wetlands and the impact of the construction works undertaken to date on the internationally important migratory waterbird populations dependent upon these wetlands.
45. In Oceania, Australia informed the Secretariat that the Senate called for a review of the management of Ramsar sites in November 2006. This should be seen as a first step to resolving and restoring damage to the ecological character of part of the Gwydir Wetlands: Gingham and Lower Gwydir (Big Leather) Watercourses, the Macquarie Marshes, The Coorong, Lake Alexandrina & Lake Albert, and other Ramsar sites. The Secretariat awaits an update on progress with this review.
46. In Europe the situation is as follows: Germany indicated to the Secretariat that it is preparing an updated Ramsar Information Sheet and map for the Mühlenberger Loch Ramsar site, showing the reduced boundaries of the site, and a consolidated report on the compensation measures taken under Article 4.2 and their effectiveness in line with Resolution VIII.20.
47. Georgia advised the Secretariat in April 2006 that it will submit an updated Ramsar Information Sheet and map for the Wetlands of Central Kolkheti Ramsar site, showing reduced boundaries of the site, and a consolidated report on the compensation measures taken under Article 4.2 and their effectiveness in line with Resolution VIII.20, after having implemented the compensation measures proposed in an expert report requested by the Ministry of Environment. Since then, no new information was provided.
48. Ukraine has not provided any information to the Secretariat regarding the development of the deep water Bystroe navigation channel in the Danube Delta and the specific points listed in Resolution IX.15 paragraph 27 (see DOC. SC36-25, para. 5 iv).

Updated Ramsar Information Sheets

49. Following the Parties' instructions in Resolution IX.15, paragraphs 28 to 30, the Secretariat sent reminder letters requesting updated Ramsar Information Sheets and maps for selected sites to Argentina, Canada and the United States on 7 August 2006; to Bahamas, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela on 20 November 2006; and to Suriname on 21 November 2006. Again in 2007 the Secretariat sent reminders letters to those Parties. The Secretariat has received updated documents from Antigua and Barbuda, Canada, Dominican Republic, Saint Lucia and Uruguay. Updated documents are in progress in Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago, United States and Venezuela.
50. Four African Ramsar sites from three Contracting Parties have been successfully updated in 2007: Botswana: Okavango Delta; Liberia: Lake Piso; Zambia: Bangaweulu Swamps and Busanga Swamps.

Goal 3: International cooperation

51. Globally, the Ramsar Secretariat has entered into agreement with a diversity of organizations, including five International Organization Partners (IOP), four global conventions, one regional convention, four UN agencies, four global programmes, four river/lakes basin organizations, one institute, one regional programme, one regional UN agency, seven other NGOs, one university center, one private company and one private alliance of companies. It is time to evaluate the existing partnerships and to use the results of this evaluation to assess the added value of each agreement. The evaluation will highlight the lessons learned with regard to the relevance, the efficiency, the effectiveness, the impact, and the sustainability of each partnership. The evaluation will also consider the coverage (spatial and thematic areas of collaboration), the coordination mechanism, and the coherence of the working relationships with existing partners. The overall result of the evaluation will be used to focus our collaborative efforts in the most productive directions. The Secretariat is proposing the establishment of Partnership Unit to strengthen its capacity to realize the full potential of international cooperation. A Partnership Development unit within the Ramsar Secretariat will enhance and assess partnership synergies through the identification of its likely determinants, so as to be used to address critical policy, evaluation, and management issues related to our collaboration with many partners at national and global levels. In the meantime, the Secretariat maintains its working relationships with the United Nation system and the organizations that have signed an agreement with the Secretariat, including the IOPs. Increasing cooperation is underway with the GEF Secretariat, UNEP, UNDP, FAO, and the UN Economic and Social Commission in Europe and Asia/Pacific, and the African Development Bank.
52. In the Americas, implementation of the High Andean Strategy as urged in Resolutions VIII.39 and IX.7 continues to be a key priority for 2007. As a result of the IV meeting of the Strategy in Mérida, Venezuela, from 15-17 September 2007, it was agreed to establish a coordination body of the strategy and hold a new meeting in Colombia in 2008. In the Pan American meeting, two Merida declarations were agreed by the Contracting Parties, with the potential to operate under the Convention. Concerning the Declaration of Merida for the Conservation, Integrated Management and Wise Use of Mangrove Ecosystems, the representatives from Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico,

Peru and Venezuela expressed interest in setting up a contact group in order to review and agree on mechanisms and tools to promote the conservation and wise use of mangrove ecosystems. This group will be coordinated by Venezuela with the support of the Ramsar Secretariat. Concerning the Declaration of Merida for the Conservation Strategy and Wise Use of the La Plata River Wetlands, the representatives from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay agreed on setting up a contact group to work on the creation of a Conservation Strategy for the La Plata Wetlands. The group will be coordinated by Argentina. The Secretariat participated actively in and continued to contribute to the development of the Western Hemisphere Strategy for Migratory Species (WHMSI) as a member of its Steering Committee.

53. In Africa, an MOU was signed with UNEP/DELIC (Division of Environmental Law and Conventions) on capacity building training for multilateral environmental negotiations for the purpose of supporting and facilitating the participation of government experts and negotiators who attended and participated at the African preparatory meeting for Ramsar COP10. Another MOU was signed with UNEP/GRASP (Great Apes Survival Project) to produce a documentary highlighting the correlations that exist between the sustainable management of wetlands and the great apes with focus on Petit Loango, a Wetland of International Importance that hosts great apes in the Republic of Gabon. Ramsar and UNEP contributed equally to the financing of this project. The Ramsar Secretariat has been collaborating with UNEP towards building on the possibility of providing support to African countries in handling the environmental impacts of oil and gas exploration activities. Unfortunately, this latter collaboration has not yielded any fruit yet.
54. Active collaboration continued between Wetlands International's WPRP (Wetlands and Poverty Reduction Project) and the Ramsar Secretariat with the aim of contributing specific input and guidance for the practical implementation of the Ramsar Resolution IX.14 on *Wetlands and poverty reduction*. The government of Switzerland is once again assisting the Convention's activities in Africa for another year through the Swiss Grant for Africa (see below). This contributed to financing the African regional preparatory meeting for COP10 and will allow support for three projects on the continent.
55. The Ramsar Convention and the US National Ramsar Committee launched a survey of selected African Ramsar sites, aimed at identifying the effects of Ramsar designation on these sites. The WacoWet regional initiative was finally officially launched (20-22 June 2007) in Benin with the aim of promoting the objectives of the Convention in West African Contracting Parties belonging the Gulf of Guinea ecological continuum (Benin, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Nigeria, Togo, etc). Progress made in the framework of this project was reported during the Africa preparatory meeting. The government of Benin has been asked to produce a proper progress report following the Secretariat guidelines by mid-January 2008. On 14 July 2007, an MOC was signed with "Ateliers Techniques des Espaces Naturels" (ATEN) in France aimed at capacity building for French-speaking Ramsar focal points in Africa for the implementation of the Convention. The module was tested for the first time in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, during the NigerWet-ChadWet regional initiative meeting organized by WWF in July 2007. It was further tested during the African regional preparatory meeting for COP10 in Yaoundé, Cameroon (November 2007). It will be officially presented at COP10 in Changwon. Collaboration with the African Development Bank (AfDB) has moved forward as the Secretary General and the Senior Advisor for Africa paid a first visit to this institution in October 2007. Further cooperation with the African

Water Facility of the AfDB was evidenced in their participation at the Ramsar African regional preparatory meeting, presenting the funding possibilities offered by their structure.

56. In the Asia region, there are two existing and two proposed Ramsar regional initiatives; these serve to bring member countries together to share experience and knowledge and to find solutions for common issues, and they provide valuable lessons and opportunities to promote the wise use of wetlands. The first initiative is the Ramsar Regional Centre for Training and Research in Central and West Asia. The Centre should work towards becoming a resource centre for member countries, while continuing to play a vital role in research and training in the region. In order to be effective, the Centre will have to be financially sustainable. The second is the Waterbird Flyway Partnership: the Asian Contracting Parties agreed to reinforce cooperation to implement Ramsar priorities for the Waterbird Flyway through strengthened links between the Flyway Partnership and the implementation of the Ramsar Convention, integration of relevant existing and new Ramsar sites into the Flyway Site Network, and development of a draft Resolution for COP10 on promoting the flyway conservation approach.
57. A Ramsar Regional Centre for East Asia (RRC-EA) is proposed by the central government of the Republic of Korea to focus on dealing with regional needs regarding various wetland issues. The proposal was warmly received by member countries of the Asia region during the Asian Regional meeting in Bangkok. The Wetland Foundation that will be founded by Gyeongsangnam-do provincial government will grant adequate financial support for the Center, and the Korean government will provide the necessary assistance for its successful operation. The Korean government will send the draft Resolution for endorsing the RRC-EA to interested participants of the Asia Regional Meeting, and the final version, which will be formally submitted to the 37th meeting of the Standing Committee, will reflect the feedback received from the Asian Parties. It was proposed that the name of the Centre be changed to “Ramsar Regional Network Center – East Asia” to better reflect its primary objective, which is to promote regional cooperation on wetland issues of common concern. It was also suggested that the Centre seek to utilize resources available within existing international organizations such as the ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation in the Philippines.
58. Another proposal on regional cooperation is the Himalayan Initiative. Relevant countries agreed to submit the regional initiative proposal to the Standing Committee for possible approval by COP10. The Asian Meeting in Bangkok warmly welcomed the ICIMOD offer to continue to serve as facilitator/coordinator in developing the proposal, and for this purpose, ICIMOD will be the communication point for the Ramsar Secretariat on behalf of the Initiative. ICIMOD will draft the proposal as per the Ramsar Guidelines and circulate it to the concerned countries for input/feedback prior to submission to Standing Committee. The International NGOs (e.g., WWF, GEC, WI) reiterated their support to ICIMOD and Himalayan countries for further development of the Himalayan Initiative.
59. Following MedWet’s external evaluation undertaken in February-March, the Steering Group met on 28-29 March 2007 in Rome, invited by Italy (chair), adopted the evaluation report with minor amendments and prepared for an interim period after the departure of the Coordinator. Greece generously seconded Dr Dionyssia Hatzilacou as interim coordinator until a new Coordinator will be recruited; she started this function, besides her position at the Hellenic Centre for Sustainable Development (situated in the same building as the MedWet Secretariat) in July. Since that time, the Steering Group has selected Mr Adnan

Budieri as the new permanent MedWet Coordinatorm, and he should take up his position early in 2008.

60. In Europe the following events are reported: a meeting was held regarding the trilateral Ramsar platform of the Morava-Dyje-Danube floodplains confluence near Bratislava, Slovakia, with Austria and the Czech Republic; the Nordic-Baltic Wetland Initiative held its annual meeting at Lapanina in Estonia, focusing on monitoring of wetlands. A preparatory meeting was organized by Wetlands International in Odesa, Ukraine, on 29-31 October for the agreement and preparation of a Black Sea Wetlands regional initiative to be submitted to Ramsar COP10 and hopefully also to be recognized by the Black Sea Convention.

Goal 4: Implementation capacity

61. At global level, the Secretariat has concluded two new arrangements with Danone Group, including Evian (France), which will provide at least €500,000 to the Convention in 2008. These new arrangements with the private sector will support concrete projects on the ground in Argentina, Thailand and Nepal, in addition to the continuing support for the production of World Wetlands Day materials. The second agreement with the private sector is with Star Alliance airline network under the “Biosphere Connections” programme to provide up to \$25,000 in air tickets for travel to meetings and seminars, for each of the next three years; this is already helping to finance the preparatory meetings for COP10.
62. As part of the Partnership Development Unit, the Ramsar Secretariat is proposing a position to help develop a fundraising strategy, taking into account the need to have a sustainable long-term financial mechanism to support the implementation of the Convention, as well as the need to put wetland issues firmly on the global agenda in order to be able to tap available and potential funding sources. In this regard, the “Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES)” could be good mechanism to secure funding for wetland conservation and wise use; this area of work is at its early stage but important efforts should be directed under the Convention to advance it. For instance, the Asia region is preparing to work towards a proposal for a financial mechanism to support the implementation of the Convention in the region to be presented to COP10; this should be linked to a good communication strategy to reach out to potential donors at the international, regional and national levels. The Asia meeting came to the following conclusions about fundraising:
- The Ramsar Convention needs to become more successful about fundraising.
 - Wetland issues need to be placed more firmly on the global agenda, e.g., with regard to climate change, so as to be able to tap into existing and potential funding sources.
 - The largest potential source of funding is at national level; Ramsar Focal Points should engage proactively with the relevant agencies at the national level to raise their awareness about the ecosystem services of wetlands and seek financial support.
 - Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) is relatively under-developed in the Asia region; more effort needs to be directed in this area so that wetland conservation and wise use efforts can benefit from additional financial and political support, especially at the national level.
63. For the Americas, in the 2007 cycle of the Wetlands for the Future Fund (WFF), eight proposals are expected to receive approval, out of a total of 18 WFF projects received in

2007. In the case of the Small Grants Fund (SGF), 11 proposals from the Americas were assessed, and although several were of very good quality, only one received funding.

64. Through the Swiss Grant for Africa, the Federal Government of Switzerland (Federal Department for the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communication) through the Swiss Agency for the Environment (OFEV) has agreed to assist the Convention's activities in Africa for another year in an annual support programme that began in 1989. The 2007 Swiss Grant for Africa will allow the Secretariat to support three projects on the continent, and it also supported the organization of the Africa Regional Preparatory Meeting for COP10 in Cameroon. This will make an important contribution to the team's strategic objectives for Africa.
65. The proposal to the Swiss government for the year 2007 will support the following activities in Africa:
 - Preparation of a series of radio programmes to illustrate the importance of wetlands for socio-economic development and poverty reduction in Rwanda. It is anticipated that the documentary will be in English, French, and Kinyarwanda and will cover the following wetlands: i) Le marais de Rugezi, ii) Le complexe Akagera, iii) Le complexe Mugesera / Rweru and iv) Le marais de Kamiranzovu.
 - Preparation and implementation of the National Ramsar Committee's action plan of Mali.
 - Assistance to the government of Swaziland in acceding to the Convention and designating its first Ramsar site.
66. The project in Rwanda will be jointly implemented with FAO, and we are working with the government of Mali to prepare the draft plan of action for the National Wetlands Committee. Our collaborative activities with UNEP/DELIC and ATEN (a French organization) in 2007 and explained above also fall under the rubric of implementation capacity.
67. To strengthen the partnership development with Danone and the new Evian "écoles de l'eau" Programme, two meetings were held in Paris with the Ramsar Secretariat. The Danone support includes renovation of our Web site, recruitment of a programme officer, and field projects that will provide new experience with NGOs implementing some of the Ramsar priority actions.
68. A training course on the "management of Ramsar sites in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe" held with Ramsar participation on the island of Vilm was organized and paid for by Germany as a contribution to the CBD programme of work on protected areas.
69. The World Heritage Committee runs a programme to increase capacities for site management in Southeastern Europe, and Ramsar was invited to participate, as many sites are shared between World Heritage and Ramsar, as well as with the UNESCO MaB Programme (Biosphere Reserves), following the initial planning meeting for the programme. A specific training workshop took place at Ohrid, the FYRO Macedonia, in September 2007, identifying wetland sites with World Heritage and Ramsar designation for further work. A first communication meeting of European STRP National Focal Points was held at Mittersill on the invitation by Austria in September.

70. The second cycle of the Klagenfurt University Master course on “Management of Protected Areas” (2007-2009) started successfully in September with a number of students promising to become effective Ramsar sites managers thereafter.
71. 27 complete project proposals were submitted to the SGF, of which 18 fulfilled the criteria and are technically feasible. With the available money for 2007, four top-ranked projects are being funded, and a portfolio of the remaining projects was sent in late 2007 to about 70 donor agencies for possible funding of additional projects.

CEPA activities

72. World Wetlands Day (WWD) 2007 proved to be a successful campaign:
 - The collaboration with FAO allowed us to produce an informative 12-page leaflet on wetlands and fisheries that will have uses beyond WWD 2007.
 - Other materials included a poster, stickers, a 7-minute Flash animation, and a number of designs for do-it-yourself fish for children.
 - Reports were received from over 85 countries and also from a few regional programmes and institutions. A number of countries, particularly France and India, are to be particularly congratulated for the significant number of reports received from different sources within their countries. France deserves special mention for its highly effective wetland network, the Pole-relais zones humides intérieures, which has resulted in over 250 WWD events being carried out in WWD 2006 and over 190 in 2007.
 - Customised materials, involving either translations into national/local languages or use of some aspect of the poster design, were sent to the Secretariat from 23 countries. The reports and information on the customised materials are available on the Convention’s Web site under WWD.
73. The materials for WWD 2008, with the theme “*Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People*”, were sent out in October and the Secretariat has already received quite a number of e-mails outlining planned WWD activities by our WWD actors. Information on suggested themes for WWD 2009-2010 will be addressed in DOC. SC36-20.
74. An assessment of WWD is currently being carried out by a consultant to inform the Secretariat, the Standing Committee, and the COP of the role of World Wetlands Day as the Convention’s campaign day of the year, looking at the breadth of the actors, targets and activities across the Convention and identifying any important gaps, the impact of WWD on wetland conservation, and the utility of the Secretariat’s WWD materials. The final report will be submitted by the consultant in mid-May. DOC. SC36-20 describes this project in more detail.
75. The number of Parties that have nominated CEPA National Focal Points (CNFP) stands at 117 (75%) for Government NFPs and 98 (62%) for NGO NFPs. This situation has not shown much improvement since mid-2006, when the figures were 72% and 62% respectively. Of particular concern is the low level of NGO nominations: it has been recognized by the CEPA Oversight Panel that it is important that both CEPA NFPs are nominated since they bring different skills to the CEPA Programme, with the NGO NFP in many cases more actively engaged at the grass roots level. Also of concern are the

frequent changes in nominations, especially of the Government NFPs, which makes continuity of a CEPA Programme very challenging, and also the number of CEPA NFPs who do not have working email addresses.

76. While a number of Parties have made efforts in CEPA action planning, as required by the Convention's CEPA Programme, there is very slow progress in this area. In addition, the feedback on the Additional guidance document on action planning, prepared in 2002, has suggested that a more practical document would provide better assistance to CEPA Focal Points in taking a more strategic approach to action planning. In August of this year a contract was signed with UNEP-DELIC to prepare a CEPA toolkit to assist Parties in CEPA action planning. This toolkit, being prepared by a consultant in consultation with a number of CEPA NFPs and other CEPA experts, will be a hands-on practical guide and should be ready for testing by the end of February 2008. The toolkit will be made available on CD and will also be available for download via the Internet. It is encouraging to note that China has been awarded an SGF grant to develop a national CEPA Action Plan and the toolkit will be helpful in this work; this will also offer a welcome opportunity to provide feedback on its utility.
77. The 'Ramsar game' produced in 2004 continues to attract interest in terms of translation and reproduction in table-sized and floor-sized versions. In China's Xixi Wetland Park a floor-sized version was produced in early 2007 and is now used as part of the Park's outreach programme in local schools. The design files for the game have been requested by several NGOs and government authorities in 2007 who are considering reproducing it. The game was recently displayed by UNESCO colleagues at the UNESCO/UNEP-organized International Conference on Environmental Education held in India in November 2007, and some interest in it has been shown very recently by colleagues in the Water Education unit in UNICEF. For World Wetlands Day this year, a well-known French educational organization, Nature et Découvertes, will use the game in workshops for children to be held on 6th February in all 70 of its outlets in France.
78. The CEPA Programme Officer wrote the preface for an educational game produced by WWF Hong Kong for use in all primary schools in Honk Kong, China. The game draws particular attention to the challenges of conserving the Black-faced spoonbill, a migratory species, and provides a good focus on the Ramsar Convention. More broadly the game also looks at sustainable lifestyles, and overall it provides an excellent resource for teachers.
79. The Wetland Link International (WLI) network of wetland education centers continues to grow and now has 344 members in 75 countries on six continents. There are now three regional networks operating in Asia, Australia and the UK/Eire. Most active is WLI-Asia: in 2007 – this network held its first international symposium, published two newsletters, and launched its own Web site. A WLI-Asia symposium is planned for 2008.
80. On 16th January, the participants in the Asia Meeting in Bangkok visited the Bang Po Wetland Information Center, a project undertaken in cooperation between the Royal Thai Army and WWF. The Center is established in Royal Thai Army buildings and managed by WWF Thailand in the framework of their cooperation with the Thai government. It is located on the edge of a mangrove and coastal mud flats ecosystem of major value, which extends widely around the northern part of the gulf of Bangkok. On average, one hundred people (mostly schoolchildren) visit the Center and the nearby wetland site per day, every day of the year.

81. Expressions of interest have been solicited for a consultancy firm to undertake a redesign of the Convention's Web site, and a number of companies have responded. The choice of project executant will be made in the coming weeks.

STRP work, together with the Ramsar Secretariat

82. It is significant to mention that the costs of participation by Secretariat staff in many of the meetings and processes requiring missions in 2007 were generously covered by the hosting organizations. During 2007 senior Secretariat staff represented the Convention's interests in a number meeting and processes of other organizations and initiatives, so as to maintain and develop recognition of the importance of the role of the Convention in such processes and partnerships.
83. During the year, these included that the Deputy Secretary General:
- participated in and spoke at international launches (in the Netherlands and UK, March) of "Waterbirds around the World", the major proceedings volume of the April 2004 Global Waterbird Flyways conference, organized by Wetlands International and Scottish Natural Heritage;
 - participated, and presented on "Management effectiveness on wetlands", at the IUCN-World Commission on Protected Areas "Marine Summit" (USA, April) which delveoped approaches to future marine protected areas networks;
 - represented the Secretariat in its role as permanent observer on Wetlands International's Supervisory Board (UK, June);
 - represented the Secretariat (with the SG) during CBD SBSTTA12 (Paris, July), including at the first joint meeting of the chairs of the scientific subsidiary bodies of the biodiversity-related conventions (a further such valuable meeting is planned for CBD SBSTTA-13 in February 2008), and in a joint CBD/Ramsar Secretariat side-event on wetlands, water, biodiversity & climate change;
 - represented Ramsar in a strategic planning workshop for the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) & Manomet Centre for Conservation, and its shorebird recovery plan (USA, July);
 - gave the opening plenary keynote presentation to the 10th International River Symposium and Environmental Flows Conference (Brisbane, September), on "Wetlands for water and people: flowing together for a sustainable environment";
 - represented Ramsar as an invited expert at the Hangang Renaissance Initiative International Symposium, presenting a keynote talk on the COP10 theme of "Healthy wetlands, healthy people: wetlands for water and people", a meeting which recognized the need for better attention to the importance of conserving and restoring urban wetlands (Seoul, Republic of Korea, October); and
 - participated as invited keynote speaker in the water and wetlands session of the Trondheim Conference on Biodiversity (Norway, November). These conferences are designed to provide scientific debate on issues relevant to CBD SBSTTA and COP issues. A paper from the presentation will form part of the proceedings volume to be made available to SBSTTA13 participants in February 2008.

GEF projects

84. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is increasingly becoming more responsive to Ramsar's role in potentially delivering its requirements, and regular contacts are ongoing between the GEF Secretariat and the Ramsar Secretariat. According to the information received from the GEF Secretariat, 40 Ramsar sites are receiving financial and technical support from GEF projects at present. Following a visit of the Ramsar Secretary General to the UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok, we have received updated information on 23 GEF projects supporting wetland conservation and sustainable use in Asia alone. These projects include inland wetland biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, coastal biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, peatland conservation, and national protected areas including wetlands.
85. Some of the GEF projects are using the Ramsar guidelines to undertake their activities. For instance, according to the Project Manager, the Pakistan Wetland Programme has relied extensively during its planning and implementation phases on technical expertise provided by the Ramsar Secretariat through the Ramsar Handbooks. This project has launched a multifaceted continuum of wetlands conservation interventions that extend from the high alpine zone to the coastal zone of the Arabian Sea. In view of this reality, the delegates to the Asia meeting in Bangkok recommended that the Ramsar Secretariat actively endeavor to form closer ties with the GEF secretariat and the GEF implementing agencies. It was suggested by the Project Manger of the Pakistan Wetlands Programme that ways should be explored to gain recognition of the incremental costs covered by Ramsar through the provision of technical materials. Without these materials, the GEF would have to pay for the necessary expertise to guide the project on wetland inventories, wetland assessment, wetland monitoring and the preparation and implementation of wetland management plans.

Synergies with other conventions

86. The Ramsar Secretariat will attend the next Biodiversity Liaison Group meeting in Bonn, May 2008, and is also attending the meetings of the Conferences of the Parties for CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD, and the intersessional meeting on desertification in preparation of CSD16. The Ramsar Secretary General has had the opportunity to make a statement at the high-level segment of these conferences. The AEWAA Agreement under the CMS Convention is attending the Ramsar regional meetings in Africa, Asia, and Europe.

Goal 5: Membership

87. In the Americas, Dominica and Haiti are working towards their accession, together with Guyana. Haiti also participated in the Pan American meeting in September 2007 in Venezuela and indicated that they expect soon to become part of the Ramsar Convention.
88. No African country has joined the Convention since last SC meeting. However, the Secretariat organized a side meeting with Angola, Ethiopia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe during the regional preparatory meeting. According to the outputs of this meeting, it's likely that Angola and Ethiopia are going to join in early 2008.
89. In Europe, contacts with wetland experts in Italy assured the Secretariat that they are in discussions with San Marino about its possible accession in future. There has been no news regarding the long-announced preparation for accession by Andorra. Besides these two, in the European Region only the Holy See is not already a Party. There is no further

development regarding the possibility of the European Union to become a Party. (Article 9.2 of the Convention limits membership, in effect, to member states of the United Nations.) The newly adopted Lisbon Treaty (December 2007) does, however, facilitate the context for the Union to become more regularly a Party to international treaties. The Secretariat tried to address the issue prior to COP8 in Valencia, but not enough Ramsar Parties responded favorably in time, and when the issue was discussed at the European Council, there was also a mixed response by the member states and the Commission.

90. In Asia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, and the United Arab Emirates have joined the Convention. Yemen has finalized the process towards their accession and we are waiting for the formal notification from UNESCO. Accession instruments and Ramsar Information Sheets for Afghanistan and Lao PDR are ready for the governments to sign and send to UNESCO.