

Contracting Parties with outstanding annual contributions

Action requested: The Standing Committee is invited to note the current status of Parties' outstanding annual contributions and actions taken and planned by the Secretariat.

1. In Resolution IX.2 (2012), the Conference of the Contracting Parties “URGES Contracting Parties with outstanding contributions to make a renewed effort to settle them as expeditiously as possible to enhance the financial sustainability of the Convention through contributions by all Contracting Parties, and REQUESTS the Secretariat to contact Contracting Parties with outstanding contributions in excess of three years and work with them to identify appropriate options and actions for addressing the situation and initiating a plan for making payment of contributions, and to report back to each Standing Committee meeting and COP on activities taken and results achieved”.
2. From 2009 to 2011, despite continued and even enhanced efforts from many levels of the Secretariat staff, the Parties' outstanding contributions increased (as did the required provision for potential non-collection/”bad debts”). These efforts included regular sending of reminders and statements via diplomatic and other governmental channels as appropriate. Mindful of the financial difficulties of the period, the Finance Officer and regional teams were in close contact with many specific Parties, their Missions, Standing Committee regional representatives, and other MEAs, keen to maximize collections and minimize the effects of delayed payments.
3. The regional meetings in 2011 and 2012 prior to the 11th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP11), as well as COP11 itself, provided additional opportunities to encourage progress. Notably, during 2011 and 2012 the Secretariat received previously overdue contributions from Chad, Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Guatemala, Iraq, Malawi, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Togo, and as a result, there was no need to increase the provision for potential non-collection/“bad debts” at the end of 2012. However, the challenge continues.
4. As of 10 February 2013 there was CHF 697,568 of outstanding annual contributions from 2012 and earlier, as shown in the attached table. There are **72 Parties** on this list, and priority actions in 2013 will focus on the **34** with **arrears of 3 or more years**. The Secretariat will use the COP decision to help in securing explicit written payment plans from as many of these as possible, and will report progress by Party to the Standing Committee's 47th meeting. It will also engage the new regional representatives on the Subgroup on Finance in this activity.
5. It has previously been suggested that the Standing Committee could request the Secretariat to manage requests from Contracting Parties with outstanding contributions in the following ways:

- by not processing further Small Grants Fund (SGF) proposals;
- by providing the Secretariat's advice and missions (including Ramsar Advisory Missions) only in emergency situations; and
- by providing delegate support to attend regional and COP meetings only if all other Parties have been assisted according to existing rules, and in any event only if the Contracting Party is not more than three years in arrears.

These suggestions have not been supported. Likewise proposals for making non-paying Contracting ineligible to vote in Convention meetings, ineligible for election to the Standing Committee, or ineligible to make nominations for membership of the STRP have not been taken forward by the Standing Committee.

6. In Resolution X.2, para. 23 (2008), African Contracting Parties agreed to make additional voluntary contributions, equating, in most cases, to CHF 1,000 per annum. The Secretariat has collected CHF 45,000 of these African voluntary contributions over the 2009-2012 period, with CHF 117,000 not yet paid. Contributions collected have been used to fund African regional initiatives, supplementing restricted 2012 Core budget allocations. These voluntary contributions will continue in the 2013-2015 triennium and will be accumulated for disbursement to African regional initiatives.

