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Facilitating travel of staff of the Ramsar Convention Secretariat

The Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) presents its compliments ...and has the honour to refer to the following:

Since the 9th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP9, 2005: Resolution IX.10), the Ramsar Secretariat has carried out a consultative process regarding the options to facilitate the work of the Secretariat and raise the visibility of the Convention, the results of which were presented to COP10.

During this process, a number of challenges facing the Ramsar Secretariat were identified (COP10 DOC.20 Addendum 1, Table 2). One of these challenges is the difficulty in obtaining travel visas for staff without international organization legitimization.

At its 10th meeting, the Conference of the Contracting Parties adopted Resolution X.5 on *Facilitating the work of the Ramsar Convention and its Secretariat*, which establishes an open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group “to evaluate the success of steps already taken and recommend additional ways of improving the current operations of the Secretariat”. Regarding specifically the issue of visas, Resolution X.5, paragraph 10 b, “requests that, where necessary, the Secretariat seek the assistance of the Contracting Parties in a timely manner to...facilitate the work of the Secretariat in their respective countries by expeditiously arranging for the issue of visas and other required support and assistance”.

The Ad Hoc Working Group on Administrative Reform met for the first time at Secretariat Headquarters in Gland, Switzerland, on 19 January 2009. After reviewing the problem of obtaining visas for Ramsar Secretariat staff, the Group considered that, following the conclusion of an agreement between Switzerland and the European Union, Ramsar Secretariat staff holding a Swiss residence permit can now travel to Schengen countries without seeking an additional visa, but that the challenges remain concerning non-Schengen countries.

Following the above-mentioned meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group and with reference to Resolution X.5, para. 10b, the Secretariat draws the attention of relevant Permanent Missions to the difficulties sometimes faced by Ramsar Secretariat staff, and respectfully requests concerned Permanent Missions to inform their Consular Services of the above and to grant, as much as possible, their assistance to Ramsar staff in obtaining visas in a timely fashion.

The Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands avails itself of this opportunity to renew the assurance of its highest consideration.

Gland, 4 February 2009