

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

26th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland, 3-7 December 2001

DOC. SC26-29

Use of the official languages at Standing Committee meetings

1. As indicated in DOC. SC26-24 with the report of the Subgroup on COP8, the question of the use of the three official languages at Standing Committee meetings and at meeting of its Subgroups was raised by Japan, and it was recommended that the issue be discussed by the Standing Committee.
2. It has been common practice at Standing Committee meetings, when no simultaneous interpretation was not available, that some Parties would intervene in French or Spanish and the Bureau would provide consecutive interpretation. During the period 1993-1999 there were one or two delegates that also required whispered interpretation because they did not understand English. At times this interpretation was provided by Bureau staff.
3. In several occasions in the past, French and Spanish speaking members of the Standing Committee formally requested to have simultaneous interpretation at the meetings, at least in the plenary sessions. This request could not be met because of the costs involves.
4. On the occasion of the 24th Meeting of the Standing Committee in 1999, the Secretary General considered that the budget line for administrative services and operating costs will allow to provide simultaneous interpretation during the three days of plenary sessions. So interpretation in the three official languages was arranged.
5. The minutes of that meeting refer to this issue as follows:

“16. Togo lauded the Bureau’s efforts in providing simultaneous interpretation for the benefit of non-English speaking members of the Standing Committee and requested, in future, translation of SC documents as well, if additional financial resources were to become available. Spain thanked the Bureau for excellent documentation and interpretation....”

“17. ...Concerning simultaneous interpretation at the SC24 meeting, France and Argentina expressed thanks for the initiative....”

6. Interpretation was provided again at the 25th meeting in 2000 and at the current meeting. The costs involved are as follows:

Total for 6 interpreters during three days, including 3 additional hours to normal working hours:	SFR 13,950
Hiring of earphones	SFR 1,500
TOTAL	SFR 15,450

It should be noted that this represent a special rate negotiated by the Bureau with this team of interpreters. UN and market rates in the area are higher than this.

7. Rule 26 of the Rules of Procedures of the Conference of the Parties, which, *mutatis mutandi*, apply to the meetings of the Standing Committee, establishes that:

“7 (c) There shall be no requirement to provide interpretation in committee or working group sessions, including the Conference Committee.”

Thus, the Secretary General in taking the decision to devote core budget resources to provide interpretation at Standing Committee meetings, considered that he was acting within the rules, since they established that interpretation at committee meetings, while no required, is not ruled out.

8. In the view of the Secretary General, the experience has demonstrated that consecutive and simultaneous interpretation provide a much greater opportunity for participation and useful contributions from a considerable number of Standing Committee members who are not fluent in English.