

## Report of the Youth Working Group

### Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to take note of the progress of the Youth Working Group (YWG), which held two virtual meetings of the WG and two workshops on youth engagement, with participation of other youth constituencies under multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and UN organizations

### Background

1. Resolution XIV.12 on *Strengthening Ramsar connections through youth* requested the Standing Committee to establish the Youth Working Group (YWG), with a mandate to advise on mainstreaming youth engagement in the governance, programmes of work, and other activities of the Convention.
2. At its 61st meeting, the Standing Committee decided on an interim chair and members of the YWG, through Decisions SC61-06 and SC61-07 respectively.
  - a. The Youth Focal Point of Australia (co-sponsor of Resolution XIV.12 with Costa Rica) was appointed as the interim chair.
  - b. Membership of the YWG comprised the following Contracting Parties: Congo, representing the Africa region; Iraq and Iran (Islamic Republic of), representing the Asia region; Austria and Slovakia, representing the Europe Region; Colombia, representing the Latin America and the Caribbean region; and Mexico, representing the North America region.

### First meeting of the YWG

3. The first meeting of the YWG was held virtually on 1 March 2023. Australia was appointed as the Chair and Iran (Islamic Republic of) as the Vice Chair of the YWG. The YWG took note of Canada's provision of funds for youth engagement and instructed the Secretariat to hold two youth engagement workshops to consult with young people globally and identify priority work for the YWG.
4. The Chair released a communiqué on 13 March 2023, noting the decisions of the YWG, and calling for greater participation of Contracting Parties in the activities of the YWG.

### Youth engagement workshops

5. Two workshops were held virtually on 21 March 2023 from 08:00 to 10:00 CET and from 16:00 to 18:00 CET.

6. A consultancy company, Flow In Action, was hired to facilitate the workshops. Social media, mailing lists, and a range of partners were used to share invitations to the workshops.
7. The workshops were opened by the Deputy Secretary General for the morning session, and the Secretary General for the afternoon session. They consisted of several short panel dialogues, followed by an interactive workshop with participants. Panellists included representatives of Youth Engaged in Wetlands, the Convention's International Organization Partners, several youth constituencies under other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), and the UN's Major Group for Children and Youth. The workshops were attended by approximately 50 participants.
8. Panellists were asked to respond to a range of questions, relating to challenges for youth engagement in wetland conservation, examples of effective youth engagement under other MEAs and at a national level, and opportunities for further events, projects, or other actions.
9. The second session involved participants being divided into several breakout rooms to explore what could be consequences of improving youth engagement in the Convention and national processes, what the desired future state would be, and what could be done now to make this a reality.
10. The debate among participants and panellists was rich and stimulating, with a range of ideas explored, the identification of both a shared understanding of agreed issues and the need to build connection between a range of actors.
11. The workshops identified a set of key needs for participants, including:
  - a. The need for Contracting Parties (CPs) to reach out to youth to involve them meaningfully in negotiation and decision-making processes;
  - b. CPs and other stakeholders need to bring young people in at the start of projects, to co-design solutions together, in a community-oriented manner;
  - c. Young people need financial resources and projects should be created with livelihood opportunities for youth in mind, and to avoid youth being treated as volunteer labour; and
  - d. CPs can include wetland conservation in employment and education strategies.
12. The workshops also identified a series of possible actions, which the YWG would explore. These included:
  - a. Creation of an online platform to connect young wetland practitioners;
  - b. Development of a structured programme of engagement for the YWG, the Convention, and CPs including a regional approach;
  - c. An intergenerational mentorship scheme for wetland professionals;
  - d. Capacity building, including leadership opportunities, training and skills development; and
  - e. Identification of financial and in-kind support, for training, paid work opportunities, attendance at conferences, and support for projects.
13. The results of the workshops have been collated into a report, which was circulated to the YWG.

### **Second meeting of the YWG**

14. The second meeting of the YWG was held virtually on 3 May 2023. The YWG discussed the outcome of the workshops and decided to begin working on the workplan of the YWG.

15. The YWG nominated Iran (Islamic Republic of) as the representative of the YWG to the Scientific and Technical Review Panel and Australia as the representative to the Strategic Plan Working Group.

**Youth advisor**

16. Paragraph 17 of Resolution XIV.12 requests the employment of a youth advisor in the Secretariat to facilitate youth engagement and projects and to help coordinate this programme of work. For Contracting Parties with available resources, the Secretariat is seeking voluntary contributions to support the employment of a youth advisor.