

Roundtable Discussion on support activities for the implementation of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

Final Report and Recommendations

Introduction:

Since the first Summit of the Americas, OAS member States have committed to building capacity for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, through CITES support projects. Moreover, the Quebec Summit in 2001 also emphasized the need to advance hemispheric conservation of plants, animals and ecosystems through networks such as the Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network (IABIN) and cooperation in the fight against illegal trade in wildlife. In response to these commitments and to the call of Inter-American Ministers and High-Level Authorities of Sustainable Development (*AG/RES. 2312(XXXVII-O/07)*), the OAS Department of Sustainable Development (OAS-DSD) has been facilitating access and exchange of information for biological diversity decision-making through IABIN and supporting countries in the promotion of strategies to address the loss of habitat for wildlife, including the effective implementation of laws, policies and regulations that address the protection of wild flora and fauna and the illegal trade in endangered species. These efforts also aim to support the implementation of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

During the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP14, The Hague 2007), the Parties to CITES identified 44 activities within an output based program to support advancement in the implementation of the Convention. These activities can be grouped in the following seven areas: 1) Regulating and monitoring wildlife trade, 2) Integrating best available scientific information into decision making, 3) Reducing over-exploitation and illegal trade, 4) Building capacity and information systems, 5) Mobilizing resources and raising awareness, 6) Enhancing cooperation with strategic partners, 7) Preparation of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (Qatar, 2010).

The CITES Secretariat is charged with the coordinating, advisory and servicing role in the working of the Convention. With the objective of identifying synergies and opportunities for cooperation, the Department of Sustainable Development of the Organization of American States (OAS-DSD), jointly with the CITES Secretariat, held a roundtable discussion in support activities for the Conservation and sustainable use of the 34,000 species of wild animals and plants. The roundtable took place on February 25, 2009 at the Organization of American States, General Secretariat Building. The roundtable discussion gathered representatives of international organizations, development agencies and non-governmental organizations

Opening Remarks:

Opening remarks were provided by OAS Executive Secretary for Integral Development, Ambassador Alfonso Quiñonez and CITES Secretary General, Mr. Willem Wijnstekers. Ambassador Alfonso Quiñonez called to join efforts of the civil society, International Organizations and so forth for Hemispheric action against illegal trade of endangered species in such critical region as megadiverse as the Americas as well as improve existing legislation in order to ensure the well-being of our people. He also stated that “the prevention of illegal trade or “traffic” of wild life and endangered species has been at the center of priorities of OAS member

States for decades. All member States are signatories and have ratified CITES, and since 1994, within the framework of the first Summit of the Americas, called for support in the implementation of the Convention through the promotion of strategies to address the loss of habitat for wildlife and the effective implementation of laws, policies and regulations that address the protection of wild flora and fauna and the illegal trade in endangered species”.

Mr. Winsjtekens pointed out that the OAS cover the most biodiversity rich part of the world where there are important amounts of CITES species along with what he highlighted as the major problem: the lack of financial resources to discuss the importance of the Convention.

Presentations:

Introduced and Chaired by Director, Cletus Springer, OAS-DSD

On the Road to Qatar 2010: CITES Work Program Presentation:

Mr. Juan Carlos Vasquez from the Office of the CITES General Secretariat, presented an overview of CITES. At the moment 175 countries have ratified CITES, listing 34,000 species to be part of the Convention. The wildlife trade has a large value in terms of development for nations. His presentation explained a work plan for the incoming years based on three main activities: Regulating and monitoring wildlife trade, integrating the best available scientific information and reducing overexploitation and illegal wildlife trade.

Roundtable on CITES related Efforts:

Subsequently, Keiko Ashida Tao, from the Sustainable Development Sector Unit Latin America and the Caribbean Region at the World Bank, underlined the value of the Inter American Biodiversity Information Network (IABIN) as a tool to support decision making processes and create partnerships among OAS members. The World Bank has 31 projects under implementation with a \$269 million investment in biodiversity activities that range from conservation in productive landscape to environmental services and adaptation measures to climate change.

Later, Ernani Pilla from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) expressed the importance of their three main activities at the Environment and Safeguards Unit (ESG) – multidisciplinary team tasked with delivering the following objectives.

- Integration of environmental sustainability outcomes and strengthening environmental management capacity in borrowing member countries.
- Implement environmentally sound operations – private & public sectors
- Foster Corporate Environmental Responsibility

These activities have the aim of being part of the decision-making process and strengthen capacity to evaluate their impacts. He also referred to the importance of best available information as a fundamental tool for project’s success.

Moreover, Pilla explained that the IDB supports projects which conserve natural habitats and biodiversity, especially within protected areas and the portfolio investment for these projects is about 100 million dollars in diverse topics such as Biodiversity, International Waters, Climate Change and Land degradation.

Claudia de Windt, from the DSD-OAS, explained how the OAS had been working on CITES implementation and the close relation to environmental law and biodiversity conservation for further success. Also, the participation of the OAS to monitor the environmental provisions in the DR-CAFTA was highlighted as part of the efforts to promote the achievement of long term priorities over environmental laws and institutional strengthening, many of this affecting CITES protected species.

Crawford Allan on behalf of TRAFFIC North America talked about capacity building in Mexico and Central America, and the management of wild life trade that does not affect the resource security and livelihoods and the avoidance of over-exploitation and illegal trade. In addition, Mr. Allan showed how different workshops helped to train personnel to manage wildlife trade and promote transparency while dealing with CITES implementation. Considering that TRAFFIC's mission that is to ensure that trade in wild plants and animals does not threaten conservation of species, the implementation of CITES is fundamental for TRAFFIC.

Participants comments and recommendations

Following, the participants commented on the relation of countries that commit environmental crimes and the victim countries.

- “There is a lack of interest in many countries to implement CITES, it seems to be too many carrots and not too many sticks”
- “The US has been innovative through the exploration of Trade Agreements as a cooperative way of enforcement like CITES implementation”.
- “In the US we believe that criminals who perpetrate crime should pay the victims of crime, the problem in America is that we need a set of appropriate laws involving environmental crimes for us to be able to infuse money out of criminals to be able to compensate victims through mechanisms in a series of laws in the context of environmental legislation. Wealthy countries should pay and compensate the countries that had been affected and use those resources for the enforcement and implementation of environmental programs”