

Report of the Secretariat on implementation of Resolution XIV.3: Strategy for communication with Contracting Parties

Action requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. endorse the proposed plan for communication with Contracting Parties; and
- ii. note that the Secretariat will apply the United Nations guidelines for gender-inclusive language in its communications.

Background and introduction

1. At the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP14) in 2022, the Parties adopted Resolution XIV.3, which in paragraph 11 *“instructs the Secretariat to improve its communications approach towards Contracting Parties, including making recommendations and any cost assessments to that end, to continue strengthening capacity-building tools such as virtual workshops and training materials, in order to enhance support to Contracting Parties; and to submit an updated strategy for communications with Parties for consideration at the 63rd meeting of the Standing Committee (SC63)”*.

Plan for improved communication

2. To follow up this instruction, the Secretariat has prepared the plan in Annex 1 of the present document for an improved communication approach with Contracting Parties that can be implemented in the current triennium. The actions and activities identified in this plan are organized in three categories: 1) information sharing; 2) official communications and virtual meeting management; and 3) capacity building. Importantly, this plan can be implemented with currently available resources with no additional investment needed.

Information sharing

3. Contracting Parties have expressed a need for enhanced information sharing between the Secretariat and Contracting Parties. Interviews and an online survey conducted as part of the work of the Effectiveness Working Group during the 2018-2022 triennium indicated a “perceived lack of communication between COPs”, with this gap in knowledge reducing the ability of Contracting Parties to effectively engage and take decisions.

4. Since COP14 the Secretariat has taken a number of actions to improve information sharing between the Secretariat and Contracting Parties including a redesigned website with enhanced functionality for accessing information, increased frequency of news stories published on the website, a newsletter and regular letters from the Secretary General informing Contracting Parties of her activities.

Official communication and virtual meeting management

5. In an effort to improve communication with Parties, the Secretariat has implemented various process-oriented actions to improve the consistency, clarity and accessibility of official communications. An internal standard operating procedure (SOP) has been put in place to guide the preparation and distribution of official communications with Parties.
6. The Secretariat has also established a process and an SOP for the organization and management of virtual meetings. The Secretariat has been using Zoom as the preferred platform and has implemented practices for meeting invitations and reminders, standardized participant naming and use of various Zoom features such as the waiting room and meeting registration.

Capacity building

7. The capacity-building activities identified in the communication plan respond to the needs of Contracting Parties as identified through Resolutions and requests to the Secretariat for specific capacity-building activities.
8. The Secretariat is of the view that the communication activities identified in the communication plan largely address the concerns identified by the Effectiveness Working Group and welcomes endorsement of this plan and feedback from the Standing Committee as to how communication can be further improved.
9. The Secretariat will ensure that its communications with Contracting Parties and other written outputs in the three languages of the Convention are gender-inclusive, following the current United Nations guidelines.¹

¹ See: <https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml>.

Annex 1

Secretariat plan for improved communication with Contracting Parties

The following three tables identify actions and activities under the three categories of 1) information sharing, 2) official communications and virtual meeting management, and 3) capacity building to improve communication with Contracting Parties.

Table 1: Synthesis of actions to improve information sharing with Contracting Parties for the 2023-2025 triennium

Activity	Objective	Format	Timeline/ status
Newsletter	Inform Contracting Parties of relevant information and news from the Secretariat on recent activities and events, new Wetlands of International Importance, new Secretariat staff, etc.	Digital newsletter sent to Contracting Parties in the official languages of the convention four times each year.	Ongoing
Letter from the Secretary General	Inform Contracting Parties of the activities of the Secretary General.	Email in the official languages of the Convention sent to Contracting Parties four to six times a year.	Ongoing
Website redesign and enhancements	Ensure that information sent to all Contracting Parties is subsequently easily accessible on the Convention website	Publish communications as notifications or news as appropriate, and highlight most recent communications.	Ongoing
Web news stories	Provide current information on a range of topics including events, new publications, and stories of how Contracting Parties are implementing the Convention.	News stories are published weekly in the three languages on the home page of the Convention website.	Ongoing
Social media	Consistently disseminate information about wetlands and promote news stories, reaching a broader audience that includes Contracting Parties and the public through the various social media channels.	Regular postings to the Convention's X, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn accounts. The Secretary General posts to her private account.	Ongoing
Announcement of new Wetlands of International Importance	Inform all Contracting Parties of changes to the List of Wetlands of International Importance in accordance with Article 8.2 of the Convention.	All new and extended Ramsar Sites are announced in a news story in the official languages on the Convention website, and the updated Ramsar List is published.	Ongoing

Activity	Objective	Format	Timeline/ status
Videos	Provide information about wetlands and their value in an easy-to-digest format for use both by the Secretariat in social media and other channels as well as by Contracting Parties.	The Secretariat produces a number of videos that include short videos on wetland topics for social media, videos from the Secretary General on international days and events of importance, and capacity-building videos. These videos are available on the Convention's YouTube channel.	Ongoing
Information products	Provide Contracting Parties with relevant topical information on wetlands.	Publish and highlight publications include fact sheets, brochures and briefing notes.	Ongoing – as requested by Parties
Meetings with Permanent Missions in Geneva	Enhance understanding of the work of the Convention with representatives in the Geneva diplomatic missions to strengthen engagement and participation of Contracting Parties.	Meetings between the Secretary General and Senior Regional Advisors with representatives of Permanent Missions in Geneva.	Ongoing
Secretary General's reports to the Standing Committee and the COP	Provide a formal report on the activities and accomplishments of the Secretariat for review by the governing bodies of the Convention.	The Secretary General provides a report on the activities and accomplishments of the Secretariat for each meeting of the Standing Committee and the COP. These reports are published in the official languages of the Convention and published on the Convention website 90 days in advance of each meeting.	Ongoing

Table 2: Synthesis of actions to enhance official communications and virtual meeting management for the 2023-2025 triennium

Activity	Objective	Format	Timeline/ status
Consistent format for official communications	Consistent and easy-to-comprehend format for official communications.	Internal SOP in place to maintain consistency in addressing recipients, use templates for official communications and apply quality control measures for language and style consistency.	Ongoing
Visible response deadline	Clear identification of deadlines to facilitate Contracting Parties responding by deadlines.	Deadlines in communications are highlighted and generally in a stand-alone paragraph.	Ongoing
Dedicated email addresses for Working Groups	Facilitate identification of email communications associated with a specific Working Group.	Dedicated email addresses for Working Groups upon request of the Working Group.	Ongoing
Enhanced Diplomatic Notes	Transparent communication and accessibility to facilitate dissemination of official information.	Diplomatic Notes are sent in full text with pdf attachment and published on the Convention website as documents and notifications.	Ongoing
Standardized use of Zoom for virtual meetings	A well-managed process for hosting virtual meetings that facilitates inclusive participation and engagement of meeting participants.	Use of Zoom as the preferred platform for virtual meetings with internal SOP for how to support online meetings including standardized participant naming so meeting participants are clearly identified. Meeting reminders are sent one day in advance. Use of a waiting room to facilitate pre-meeting discussions for chairs, consultants and the Secretariat. Option to register for a Zoom meeting, streamlining attendance tracking.	Ongoing

Table 3: Synthesis of capacity building activities for the 2023-2025 triennium

Activity	Objective	Format	Timeline/ status
Introductory course on the Convention on Wetlands	Provide basic information on the Convention to new Contracting Party Focal Points and individuals involved with implementation of the Convention.	Stand-alone, self-paced interactive online training. Hosted by InforMEA and available in the Convention’s website.	Completed
Training for Scientific and Technical Review Panel members and Focal Points	Support greater engagement of STRP National Focal Points in STRP proceedings, strengthening ownership, uptake and application by improving knowledge of e.g. STRP mandate, functions of the Panel, roles and responsibilities, workspace.	Stand-alone, self-paced interactive online training. Hosted by InforMEA and available in the Convention’s website.	Completed
National Focal Points welcome package	Support the induction period of newly appointed National Focal Points, providing them with all the knowledge and tools necessary for implementing the Convention in their countries.	Dedicated web pages with relevant materials is shared with newly designated National Focal Points.	Completed
Redesign the dedicated capacity-building section in the Convention website	Centralized repository for all capacity-building materials and resources.	Deliver updated section on Convention website.	Completed
Regional training of wetland managers – a manual for Ramsar Regional Initiatives	To elevate RRI’s capacity to support implementation of the Convention, drawing on successful RRI training materials and activities to provide a guideline for other RRIs.	Training manual	Planning stages
Global training on national wetland inventories	Provide Contracting Parties with information and knowledge to undertake and manage national wetland inventories.	On-site training in three modules. The first module “Introduction to National Wetland Inventories” will be held in 2024 in South Korea, with the support of UNOSD. The second and third modules (respectively on Earth Observation techniques, and on managing and updating national wetland inventories) will be proposed in 2025 and 2026.	In development

Activity	Objective	Format	Timeline/ status
Training for RIS compilers on how to use the RSIS	Provide Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) compilers with knowledge and skills to effectively use the RSIS system and update RIS.	Stand-alone, self-paced interactive online training. Hosted by InforMEA.	Proposed
Training webinars	Implementation of the new CEPA approach	Webinar	Q1 2024
	Launch of new STRP products	Webinar	2024/2025
	Submission of National Reports to COP	Webinar	2024
	National inventories	Webinar	2024/2025
	RSIS	Webinar	2024/2025