SC63 Doc.13.2

Report of the Secretariat on implementation of Resolution XIV.3: Enhancing intersessional collaboration between Contracting Parties

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Action requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to endorse the proposed tools and approach for enhancing intersessional collaboration between Contracting Parties.

Background

1. This report provides a response to the instruction given by the Standing Committee at its 62nd meeting (SC62), in Decision SC62-18:

    "The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to follow approach 1 as defined in document SC62 Doc.12, using existing tools in preparing a plan to be presented to the 63rd meeting of the Standing Committee, recognizing that the implementation of those tools should not replace in-person negotiations, and noting that further discussions to refine the process will be held."

2. Approach 1 as presented in SC62 Doc.12 is as follows:

    "Relevant contact information of individuals within a defined group (e.g. working groups, groups of interested Contracting Parties, all Parties) would be made accessible, including address lists of group members. This would facilitate communication through conventional means such as email, phone calls, and video meetings. For collaborative document preparation, the Secretariat would use SharePoint, a widely used web-based application that would enable Parties to submit and provide comments on documents in an open space where comments would be visible and accessible to all members of a defined group."

3. In document SC62 Doc.12, the Secretariat expressed its view that the benefits of this approach would be that it could be implemented quickly at low cost, leveraging existing tools, specifically the constituent relationship management (CRM) system which the Secretariat currently uses to manage contact information, mailings and meeting registration, and Office 365 in conjunction with SharePoint for which the Secretariat has a global license. This approach would be user-friendly, requiring no additional logins, credentials, or training for Contracting Parties. And importantly, this approach is not intended to replace in-person negotiations.

Proposed approach

4. The Secretariat has identified and is presently utilizing tools that facilitate collaboration among Contracting Parties by offering solutions for communication, document sharing and

commenting and virtual meetings during intersessional periods. All or some of these tools have been used to facilitate intersessional collaboration with the Standing Committee representatives, the Management Working Group, the Strategic Plan Working Group, the Working Group on Institutional Strengthening, the CEPA Oversight Panel, the Subgroup on COP15, and the Youth Working Group.

5.   In response to Decision SC62-18, the Standing Committee is invited to endorse the use of the following tools and solutions to facilitate intersessional collaboration among Contracting Parties:

   a.   The Convention's CRM platform: This platform holds data on all essential contacts related to the Convention, including Focal Points, Observer organizations, RSIS users, members of the Scientific and Technical Review Panel, the Standing Committee and Working Groups, as well as funding organizations. Its primary function in this context is to disseminate pertinent information to Contracting Parties through various processes. The CRM is used to manage group membership, electronic mailings, meeting registration and meeting invitations, and share instructions related to the tools outlined below.

   b.   SharePoint: This platform enables the creation of a folder and file structure allowing Contracting Parties to access documents through a simple link. Maintained by the Secretariat, the inclusion of a "drop folder" allows members to upload files, for the Secretariat's appropriate placement in the folder structure. This tool was used successfully in support of the Working Group on Institutional Strengthening, as a curated repository of 142 documents relevant to the work of the Group.

   c.   Adobe online: This platform allows members to provide comments on documents in PDF format without the need for a login. A user-friendly interface displays all submitted comments in real time, enabling Parties to view existing comments with attribution, contribute comments or new content and respond to ongoing discussions. This tool has been used to facilitate collaboration in the preparation of documents including document SC63 Doc.17.2 *Report of the Secretariat on the proposed future operations of the CEPA Oversight Panel*, the *Draft Framework for the 5th Strategic Plan* and the terms of reference for the governance synthesis report consultancy for the Working Group on Institutional Strengthening, as well as in the submission of comments on the draft of the report itself and the report presentation. The tool has also been used for the submission of comments to meeting reports of the CEPA Oversight Panel, the Working Group on Institutional Strengthening and the Strategic Plan Working Group.

   d.   Zoom and MS-Teams: These are used with the choice between the two tools based on factors such as the number of participants, anticipated level of interaction between participants and requirements for interpretation. Based on the particular needs of a meeting, the Secretariat utilizes processes and features to enhance the participants' experience, such as refined naming, strategic use of "waiting rooms", pre-registration processes, interpretation set-up, chat-function monitoring and adherence to efficient housekeeping rules.

6.   The experience of the Secretariat and feedback of Parties show that use of these tools facilitates effective intersessional collaboration. These tools and the processes to support their use balance user-friendliness and flexibility, remaining sufficiently adaptable to cater to specific needs without introducing unnecessary complexity to procedures or access rights.

7. To date, these tools have been utilized primarily in support of Working Groups with a selection based on the needs of the Working Group and the instructions of the Chair or Chairs. The Secretariat proposes that when new Working Groups are convened, the Secretariat brief the Chairs on the tools and support processes available so that they can make informed recommendations to Working Group members on how intersessional work will be facilitated and supported.

8. The Secretariat envisages that some proponents of draft resolutions will want to utilize these tools and support processes to facilitate consultation on a proposal. Should a proponent wish to use these tools, the process could be as follows:

    a. The Secretariat creates a dedicated space on SharePoint and uploads a first draft received from the lead author;
    c. The lead author determines the list(s) of recipients who will have access to comment on the document;
    d. The Secretariat sends a link to the selected individuals and/or groups enabling them to provide their comments to the document online; and
    e. The lead author incorporates the received comments and updates the document accordingly. Depending on the complexity of the document and the extent of comments received, subsequent rounds of editing may be necessary.

9. The Secretariat notes that at present there are no incremental costs to utilizing these tools to support intersessional collaboration among Parties. The Secretariat does not anticipate any significant costs in continuing to use these tools during the remainder of the triennium.

10. The Secretariat remains committed to supporting Contracting Parties through this approach, seeking optimization and introducing new tools and services when they align with the needs of the Parties. The Secretariat will ensure that collaborative processes remain efficient and dynamic, keeping pace with evolving technology.