

Report of the Subgroup on COP14

Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- i. take note of this report;
- ii. approve the dates for COP14;
- iii. submit the new dates for COP14 to the extraordinary COP meeting to be held in 2021;
- iv. defer a decision on the selection of the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards to SC60 in order to give the Subgroup on COP14 time to properly review and carefully consider the candidates for these prestigious awards.

Background

1. At its 57th meeting (SC57), the Standing Committee accepted by acclamation the offer of China to host the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP14) in Wuhan, China.
2. The Standing Committee adopted Decision SC57-18 as follows: "The Standing Committee established the Subgroup on COP14, chaired by China and also comprising Algeria, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Costa Rica, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America, to oversee the COP14 planning process and to develop ideas regarding the celebration of the Convention's 50th anniversary in 2021, seeking the support of other Contracting Parties as required."
3. The Standing Committee SC58 intersessional virtual meeting adopted Decision SC58-11 on the oral report of the Subgroup on COP14 which introduced the progress with preparation from December 2019 to June 2020. The theme for COP14, "Wetlands action for people and nature", was agreed subject to the internal clearance of the host country.

Progress with preparation for COP14 after SC58

4. Considering the uncertainty of COVID-19 pandemic, and number of international conferences that will be held in China in 2021, the Subgroup agreed that a postponement of COP14 to the fourth quarter of 2022 would be practical, after discussions at a series of virtual meetings on 24 November 2020 (participants: Armenia, China, France, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA), 19 January 2021 (participants: Armenia, Australia, Austria, France, Switzerland, UK, USA, CEPA Chair, STRP Chair, and Slovenia as observer), and email communication in March 2021 (sent by

China, replied and agreed by Armenia, Australia, Austria, Costa Rica, France, Switzerland, USA and Slovenia).

5. A mechanism to approve the budget for the next triennium, the Secretariat action plan, and all urgent issues, were proposed by members in above meetings and emails.
6. On 29 April 2021, the Secretariat sent a Diplomatic Note to the host country requesting finalization of the dates for COP14 in the final quarter of 2022. The host country is going through its internal procedure of approval. (After internal clearance, the host country agreed to postpone COP14 to 21-29 November 2022.)
7. During 11-13 May 2021, the RAA of China and the COP14 preparation team visited Wuhan and had meetings with the municipal government. Issues such as the venue, time, size, field trip sites and major activities were discussed with the host city.
8. On 4 June 2021, the Subgroup on COP14 members discussed in a virtual call meeting new dates, the size, the venue and other matters for COP14. The host city, Wuhan Municipality, made a presentation on their preparatory efforts and proposed changing the venue from the Intercontinental to the East Lake Conference Centre, stating that it is more convenient to get supporting facilities with favorable price. With view to COVID-19 concerns, alternative scenarios should be considered, including reducing the maximum number of participants to 1000 (noting recent COP attendance numbers: COP13 - 1396, COP12 – 930, and COP11 – 1371), renting the entire venue during the COP14 exclusive use, and further noting that the largest conference room at the East Lake Conference Centre can accommodate 1,500 in theatre style with chairs only or 1,000 with chairs and tables in theatre style. With a total building area of 70,000 square meters, the Center has conference and reception rooms of all sizes, in conformity with the conference requirements. East Lake International Conference Center is also enclosed by the beautiful East Lake on three sides, making it an ideal spot to appreciate the harmony between the city and wetland. Subgroup members agreed that secretariat and host country will work further on selecting venue for COP 14.
9. The process for selecting the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award winners as approved by Post SC58 intersessional Decision 7 requires the COP14 Subgroup to review the recommendations provided by the Secretariat and propose to the Standing Committee award winners. The Subgroup proposed that the Secretariat proceed with the review and evaluation process, and provide its recommendations to the Subgroup by 16 June, in case that the Standing Committee decides during its 22 June meeting that the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Awards be included in the SC59 agenda, the COP14 Subgroup will then convene that week to discuss the recommendations provided by the Secretariat and propose award winners to the Standing Committee for consideration. However, in the June 4 virtual call meeting, it was agreed by the Subgroup that the matter is not time sensitive, and could be postponed and taken up during SC60.
10. The subgroup on COP14 agreed to the view of the Secretariat after consulting its legal adviser that the new dates for COP14 should be to be subject to confirmation by the extraordinary COP to be held in 2021.
11. During the future preparatory process for COP14, the host country and the Subgroup on COP14 would continue to follow up with the latest situation of COVID-19 pandemic and the operation of other international conferences, especially the experiences of CBD COP15 in October 2021.