



## Convention on Biological Diversity

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### Subsidiary Body on Implementation

#### Fourth meeting

Nairobi, 21–29 May 2024

Item 8 of the provisional agenda\*

#### Review of the effectiveness of the processes under the Convention and its Protocols

### Compilation of views from Parties and stakeholders on virtual and hybrid meetings, including relevant experience\*\*

Note by the Secretariat

#### Introduction

1. As requested in paragraph 8 of decisions 15/18, CP-10/8 and NP-4/9, adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol, and the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol, respectively, the Executive Secretary is circulating herewith, for the information of participants in the fourth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation, a compilation of views submitted to the Secretariat in response to notification No. 2023-027 of 13 March 2023 regarding participation in, or conducting virtual and hybrid meetings during 2021 and 2022.
2. Submissions were received from the following Parties: Brazil, Canada, Cote d'Ivoire, European Union, Guinea Bissau, Japan, Kuwait, Mauritius, New Zealand, Nigeria, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Submissions were also received from the following organizations: G-BIKE, Local and Subnational Governments Major Group (LSNG), and Third World Network.
3. Pursuant to the decisions referred to in paragraph 1 above, this document also provides information regarding the experience of some Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) on the conduct of hybrid and virtual meetings, namely: The Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions (BRS), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and the Convention on Wetlands (RAMSAR). The Secretariat was also given access by UNEP to its internal study on virtual meetings prepared, with the participation of MEAs, in 2020 and revised in April 2021.

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\* CBD/SBI/4/1.

\*\* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

4. The information compiled in this document is structured as follows:<sup>1</sup> section A contains the submissions from Parties; section B comprises the submissions from organizations; and section C sets out the experience of relevant MEAs.

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<sup>1</sup> The submissions, experiences and studies have been reproduced in the form and languages in which they were provided to, or gathered by the Secretariat. Hyperlinks are provided for lengthy documents.

**A. SUBMISSIONS FROM PARTIES**

<b>Brazil</b>	30 June 2023
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Brazil's submission regarding virtual and hybrid meeting pursuant to Paragraph 8, COP Decision 15/18

From Brazil's perspective, virtual meetings should not replace face-to-face negotiations and should only be convened on an exceptional basis.

The experiences of online SBSTTA-24 and SBI-3 have demonstrated that virtual modalities are overly burdensome for Parties, in particular developing countries. Connectivity issues and the lack of opportunities for informal exchange of views, mixed with poor audio and video quality, have led to less effective communication amongst delegates and, in some cases, to misinterpretation of countries' proposals and positions.

Furthermore, many delegates, when engaging in virtual meetings, struggle to create an environment that allows them to focus on the negotiation, as many representatives based in their capitals still need to manage their regular workload, thus undermining the quality of their engagement.

Therefore, Brazil understands that face-to-face interactions remain vital to enhance trust amongst Parties, identify key sticking points and build common ground and that virtual negotiations should not be encouraged.

At the same time, during the in-person SBSTTA, SBI and OEWG meetings last year, live streaming of plenary and contact group meetings has proven useful to enable technical experts who were not in a position to attend those meetings to provide real time inputs to delegates at the venue. Many delegates that do not take part in multilateral negotiations on a regular basis have gained an understanding of how those negotiations operate, which has helped different ministries and government agencies improve their preparation for future meetings. Hence, Brazil would encourage improving live streaming options for future meetings.

Canada

30 June 2023


 Environment and  
Climate Change Canada

 Environnement et  
Changement climatique Canada

## CANADA'S VIEWS AND EXPERIENCE ON PARTICIPATING IN OR CONDUCTING VIRTUAL AND HYBRID MEETINGS

Canada recognizes and supports the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) current approach on the selection of a meeting format wherein no final decisions are taken virtually, with the exception of budgetary and procedural matters. Canada further recognizes the need to ensure the full and effective participation of Parties, especially developing country Parties, as well as key stakeholders and partners including Indigenous Peoples and Women's groups, in order to promote equitable, transparent and inclusive processes under the Convention.

Canada believes that, for meetings where no final decisions are taking place, there is an important role and contribution that can be made to the CBD's activities by using virtual meetings and by further ensuring that, for meetings where in person participation is required, that a hybrid option is always offered.

Canada recognizes that one of the lessons learned from the Covid-19 Pandemic is our collective ability to engage in virtual settings. We were required to adapt to a virtual format and have therefore found new ways, platforms and techniques to deliver our work. Not only do we now have the capability to deliver our work virtually, there are also many benefits to virtual and hybrid meetings and consultations. Virtual interactions are far more cost-effective, accessible, inclusive, and sustainable counterparts to the traditional in-person format. In person meetings have a much higher environmental impact than their virtual counterparts and this is particular true of CBD meetings that require participants to fly long distances. Virtual and hybrid meetings also promote inclusivity by ensuring that participants who may have limited ability to travel for budgetary, medical or family constraints still have the opportunity to engage and provide their views in the CBD's activities. As we collectively enter into a demanding implementation period following the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, virtual and hybrid meetings also represent a way of prioritizing scarce budgetary resources for where they are most needed: supporting the framework's implementation.

Canada recognizes that, while there are many important benefits of virtual and hybrid meetings, it remains important to consider and try to address concerns about equity and participation. This is in particular true for participants from developing country Parties, as well as Indigenous Peoples, who may have different levels of access to dependable facilities to support their virtual participation. Canada would invite the Secretariat to explore options to help ensure that participants in need have access to dependable means to connect virtually to the CBD's activities and report back to Parties on how best it can address these concerns and provide the needed support.

Cote d'Ivoire

14 June 2023

MINISTÈRE DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT  
ET DU DÉVELOPPEMENT DURABLE

COORDINATION GÉNÉRALE  
DES PROGRAMMES ET PROJETS

POINT FOCAL BIODIVERSITÉ

N° 025 /MINEDD/CAB/CGPP/PFNCBD/nj

REPUBLIQUE DE CÔTE D'IVOIRE  
*Union - Discipline - Travail*



Abidjan, le 14 JUIN 2023

**A**  
Monsieur le Secrétaire Exécutif Intérimaire  
de la Convention sur la Diversité  
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Montréal ; Québec, Canada H2Y, 1N9  
Fax : (514) 288 6588  
**Montréal**

**Objet :** Présentation de points de vue et d'expériences sur la participation ou la conduite de réunions virtuelles et hybrides

**Monsieur le Secrétaire Exécutif Intérimaire,**

Par courrier en date du 13 mars 2023, Ref.: SCBD/OES/DC/WDY/IM/90891, vous avez invité les Parties à soumettre leurs points de vue et leur expérience concernant la participation à des réunions virtuelles et hybrides et/ou la tenue de telles réunions en 2021 et 2022.

Compte tenu du nombre limité de réponses reçues par le Secrétariat, vous avez de nouveau informé les Parties que la date limite de soumission des points de vue a été prolongée jusqu'au 30 juin 2023.

La Côte d'Ivoire vous remercie bien vivement et saisit l'opportunité pour vous faire part de sa contribution sur le sujet à travers ses expériences vécues lors de l'élaboration du cadre mondial de la Biodiversité et bien d'autres réunions.

Une réunion virtuelle est un rassemblement d'individus qui se déroule en ligne, via une application web ou par l'intermédiaire d'une plateforme de visioconférence. Ainsi, les participants ont la possibilité de se connecter en quelques instants, quel que soit leur emplacement géographique. L'utilisation de ce type de réunions digitales a connu une forte croissance dans la période 2021-2022, correspondant à la crise de la pandémie de Covid-19.

Certes la réunion virtuelle offre l'opportunité de se rejoindre depuis n'importe quel endroit dans le monde. Il devient alors bien plus facile de travailler avec différents acteurs présents sur d'autres fuseaux horaires ce qui favorise la flexibilité du travail. Cette méthode a permis d'avancer considérablement dans les travaux d'élaboration du cadre mondial. Toutefois, il est bon de noter qu'elle comporte d'énormes inconvénients.

Lors des réunions virtuelles, les problèmes techniques sont récurrents impactant de ce fait négativement le déroulement des travaux. Les problèmes de connexion à Internet ou les difficultés liées à l'audio et à la vidéo font également partie des écueils courants.



L'écran qui se plante, le partage d'écran dysfonctionnel, l'audio/micro qui résonne, une caméra de mauvaise qualité, une image saccadée, une mauvaise connexion au réseau internet, les irrptions d'une ou plusieurs personnes ayant les micros ouverts, les problèmes de fuseaux horaires etc. sont quelques exemples de situations qui survenaient avec du matériel quelquefois non adapté.

Les réunions virtuelles sont régulièrement perturbées par les urgences administratives. Dans ces cas, le sujet est connecté ou présent en ligne sans pouvoir suivre véritablement. Il est distrait ou absent ; toute chose qui impacte négativement son implication et partant sa productivité.

Autant d'aspects négatifs qui ont émaillé les réunions virtuelles organisées par le Secrétariat Exécutif au cours du processus d'élaboration du cadre mondial de la Biodiversité.

Il est bon de noter que les réunions virtuelles, de manière générale, permettent de réaliser des économies liées entre autres aux déplacements ou à l'hébergement des acteurs. Les participants n'ayant plus à se retrouver dans un lieu physique, l'utilisation des ressources est optimale et peut donc servir à renforcer les capacités des pays en voie de développement.

A cet effet, la Côte d'Ivoire recommande que le Secrétariat Exécutif :

- apporte un appui financier aux points focaux afin d'investir dans un système virtuel de qualité (ordinateur portable, kit de matériels de visioconférence, des écouteurs appropriés, écrans de projection, achat de datas et de matériels pour une bonne connexion internet etc.) ;
- renforce les capacités des points focaux à l'utilisation des logiciels tels que Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Meet et bien d'autres encore.

Je vous prie d'agréer, **Monsieur le Secrétaire Exécutif Intérimaire**, l'expression de mes salutations distinguées.



European Union

8 May 2023

**EU and its Member States  
submission**

8 May 2023

**Submission by the EU and its Member States to  
CBD Notification 2023-027 on virtual and hybrid meetings**

The EU and its Member States welcome the invitation to submit their views and experience as regards participating in, and/or conducting virtual and hybrid meetings in 2021 and 2022.

We thank the Secretariat, the COP President, SBI and SBSTTA chairs and the respective bureau members for their efforts over the past two years to organise virtual meetings to cope with the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These virtual meetings allowed advancing with the agenda of the CBD and its Protocols and the preparations for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Despite their limitations, they helped maintaining political momentum and preparing on substance. We should build on experience gained, recognizing the limitations of virtual meetings but also the potential benefits, in particular of hybrid meetings, such as reducing environmental impacts<sup>1</sup>, reducing financial costs and increasing participation. It could be useful to use virtual meetings for preparation of negotiations such as presentations by the Secretariat of the documents and first readings, while we recognise that physical meetings will remain necessary for deeper exchanges of views and formal decision making. If a first reading is done virtually, time at physical meetings can be used more effectively. That said, we think there is a merit in further considering the potential pros and cons of virtual and hybrid meetings, as well as ways for addressing technical and practical issues to ensure all representatives can benefit.

The EU and its Member States much appreciated the benefits from hybrid meetings and the use of the Interactio platform. This allowed some cost-savings for experts that otherwise might have participated physically. It also allowed participation by experts that otherwise would not have participated at all. The technical features of the Interactio platform were appropriate and generally worked well, though also the EU and its MS have been occasionally affected by a range of technical glitches. Virtual participation has been particularly useful for parts of the agendas that entailed little interaction, such as the presentation and first readings of documents.

It will remain important to apply best practices when promoting and conducting virtual and hybrid meetings, taking into account recent experience.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-021-27251-2>  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00207233.2020.1864190?journalCode=genv20>

Guinea Bissau

11 April 2023

**Points de vue par rapport aux Réunions hybrides et virtuelles**

En ma qualité de Point Focal du Protocole de Nagoya pour la Guinée-Bissau, Je vous en remercie très chaleureusement par cette opportunité pour présenter mes points de vue par rapport à mes éventuelles expériences pendant la période 2021 et 2022.

**Réunions virtuelles:**

Concernant à cette option que la plus part des Organizations Internationales ont décidés, tenant compte surtout pendant la période ou le COVID-19 affecté beaucoup des pays au niveau mondial, tenant compte que mon pays s'inscrit dans le cadre des pays en développement et avec la faible capacité de connexion via internet, associé à les difficultés de ravitaillement de l'énergie électrique, à chaque fois que nous devons participer à ce genre de réunion, il nous faudrait recharger préalablement le Lap top ainsi que téléphone cellulaire en cas de coupure du courant ou l'épuisement de la baterie.

On s'est confronté avec beaucoup de difficultés due à la faible connexion, associé par conséquence aux difficultés de traduction simultanée de la réunion.

S'il y avait eues des possibilités de nous faire connecter à travers un link d'un pays avec le débit de communication importante, ça serait un avantage.

**Réunions hybrides:**

Cette option semble être la meilleur à chaque fois qu'il y a eu de difficulté de faire participer tous le délégués aux rencontres. Bien sûr que la réunion présentiel est toujours la meilleur, tout en permettant les échanges directe parmi les participants, l'accès aux documents, indépendamment d'autres avantages.

Il est très important d'avoir accès aux documents en diferentes langues des Nations Unies pour permettre la meilleur compréhension et la participation des délégués aux réunions, indépendamment des difficultés économiques pour faire leurs traductions.



**Japan**

29 June 2023

**Subject: Submission of views and experience on participating in or conducting virtual and hybrid meetings**

(Ref.: SCBD/OES/DC/WDY/IM/90891)

Japan appreciates the efforts made by the Secretariat to organize meetings during difficult times under the COVID-19 pandemic. In view of the purpose of notification 2023-027, Japan would like to submit the following:

The Informal Co-Chairs' Advisory Group on Digital Sequence Information on Genetic Resources took place online for several times in autumn 2021, spring and autumn 2022, limiting the number of participants to only one. For some countries, it was not easy for only one person to cover all the discussion points. Although online consultations seem handy, setting the time and date one-sidedly often prevents participants from having constructive discussions. We request the Secretariat to pay full attention to the availability of potential participants and their time zone before arranging meetings.

[END]

**Kuwait**

28 March 2023

**From:** Lena A Al-Awadhi <[L.Alawadhi@epa.gov.kw](mailto:L.Alawadhi@epa.gov.kw)>  
**Sent:** 28 mars 2023 08:56  
**To:** Secretariat <[SECRETARIAT@cbd.int](mailto:SECRETARIAT@cbd.int)>  
**Subject:** Submission of views and experience on participating in or conducting virtual and hybrid meetings

Dear Mr. Cooper,

In reference to Notification 2023-027, Ref.: SCBD/OES/DC/WDY/IM/90891 and dated 13 March 2023, regarding the submission of views and experience on participating in or conducting virtual and hybrid meetings. We, at the Environment Public Authority in the State of Kuwait, consider the virtual and hybrid meetings to be quite successful for discussions and deliberations. Moreover, the virtual and hybrid meetings were also advantageous since they proved to be time and money efficient. However, we believe that when it comes to final and crucial decisions, face-to-face meetings should be held.

Best Regards,

Leina Al-Awadhi

Mob: +965 99080603

CBD National Focal Point and CoP Bureau Member, Asia Pacific region.

Ramsar Focal point.

Head of the National Biodiversity Committee

Director of Biodiversity Conservation Department - Environment Public Authority (State of Kuwait)

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**Mauritius**

25 April 2023



**MINISTRY OF AGRO-INDUSTRY & FOOD SECURITY**

**National Parks & Conservation Service, Réduit**



Our Ref: NP 39/1/Notification V14

25 April 2023

To: David Cooper  
 Acting Executive Secretary  
 Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity  
 United Nations Environment Programme  
 413 Saint-Jacques Street, Suite 800  
 Montreal, Quebec, Canada  
 H2Y 1N9  
 Tel: +1 514 288 2220  
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 E-mail: [secretariat@cbd.int](mailto:secretariat@cbd.int)

**Subject: CBD Notification 2023-027-Submission of views and experience on participating in or conducting virtual and hybrid meetings**

Dear Sir,

The National Parks and Conservation Service is pleased to submit the requested views hereunder; on the above subject matter addressed under CBD Notification 2023-027.

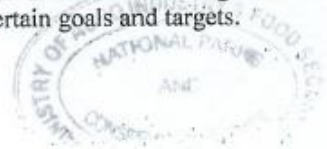
The National Parks and Conservation participated both during the first and second segments of virtual (Online meetings) of the CBD-OEWG. SIDS countries such as Mauritius faced certain constraints to effectively and fully participate into the aforementioned virtual meetings and negotiations on GBF Post 2020 and DSI.

First and foremost, access to the online meetings during the first segment was somewhat cumbersome and restricted owing to the huge number of online participants from parties.

The National Parks and Conservation Service is limited in its logistic support and/or resources in terms of rapid and smooth internet connection to be able to follow diligently and participate fully in those online meetings without any internet connection interference.

Furthermore, it was also to be noted that the online meetings that were scheduled and held in different time zones made it difficult to follow meetings specially during odd hours at night whereby government offices are closed and online meetings had to be followed from home in rural areas with even poorer internet connections.

This Service considers that online-virtual meetings resulted in limited negotiations on key thematic areas within the GBF Framework post 2020. More powerful, effective and equalised negotiations were noted amongst parties of different GDP across the globe during the Face to Face/In Person meetings at UN centre in Geneva and the concurrent meetings held at UN Centre in Nairobi Kenya with common consensus reached on certain goals and targets.

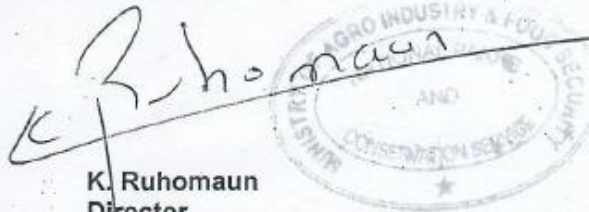


The National Parks and Conservation Service as the NFP to CBD and representing the Republic of Mauritius urges the CBD Secretariat to encourage and support face to face-in person CBD meetings that would facilitate a more harmonised and equalised negotiation amongst parties of different virtual logistic capacities and capabilities.

However, Mauritius also recognises that online-virtual meetings provides an alternative rapid and innovative means of communication to support and facilitate discussions amongst parties to address Biodiversity issues and thematic areas of high relevance- significance and urgency.

The National Parks and Conservation Service recommends that the discussions, outcomes and negotiations of online-virtual meetings could be held on an ad-hoc basis as and when required but in person meetings by parties should be equally facilitated and supported by CBD Secretariat for successfully implementing GBF post 2020; DSI Framework and other resolutions adopted by CBD COP 15 in Montreal Canada.

Please Accept; Sir, the assurances of my highest considerations.



**K. Ruhomaun**  
**Director**  
**National Parks and Conservation Service**  
**National Focal Point Convention on Biological Diversity**  
**For Senior Chief Executive**  
**Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security**  
**Reduit.**  
**Republic of Mauritius.**

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*All correspondence should be addressed to Director, NPCS*  
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New Zealand

9 May 2023

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**NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION ON VIEWS AND EXPERIENCE ON PARTICIPATING IN OR CONDUCTING VIRTUAL AND HYBRID MEETINGS**

Aotearoa New Zealand thanks the Secretariat for the invitation to submit views and experience on participating in or conducting virtual and hybrid meetings (Notification 2023-027) and is pleased to provide the comments below.

**1. Cost savings**

1.1 New Zealand observes that virtual meetings have allowed for significant cost savings when compared to in-person attendance at meetings. Travel to in-person meetings can be expensive and time consuming, particularly for remote countries such as New Zealand. New Zealand officials usually require multiple connections to attend in-person meetings, and this can entail travel times in excess of 24 hours. New Zealand notes that virtual and hybrid meetings significantly reduced New Zealand's travel expenditure and the amount of time our officials spent travelling in 2021 and 2022.

**2. Emissions reductions**

2.1 New Zealand's public sector is aiming to be carbon-neutral by 2025. We have set emissions targets for 2025 and 2030 that are in line with a global emissions pathway that limits warming to no more than 1.5 degrees centigrade. As a geographically isolated country, our emissions derived from air travel to attend multilateral meetings are significantly higher than many other countries. New Zealand observes that the use of virtual and hybrid meetings during 2021 and 2022 allowed for a significant reduction in our travel emissions, whilst still allowing us to engage with CBD work streams.

**3. Health and welfare considerations**

3.1 Virtual and hybrid meetings are often scheduled at challenging times for New Zealand and other countries in the Pacific region to attend. New Zealand officials often have to participate in virtual/hybrid meetings overnight, and this has negatively impacted the welfare of our staff. The effects of late night meetings are exacerbated when meetings are scheduled over multiple nights or weeks in a row. For example, New Zealand officials had to virtually attend SBSTTA 24 (May – June

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2021) overnight meetings for a period of six weeks. This had a severe impact on well-being.

#### **4. Connectivity issues**

- 4.1 New Zealand notes that connectivity issues can negatively impact virtual/hybrid meetings, particularly for developing countries. Poor connectivity can hamper meetings that require effective engagement from all parties, disempowering developing countries, not least those from small island developing States, including Pacific SIDS, that are particularly liable to connectivity issues. The same drawback affects participation by Indigenous Peoples.

#### **5. Engagement**

- 5.1 New Zealand considers a drawback of in-person and hybrid meetings is that there is limited opportunity to make connections with other participants, including Indigenous Peoples and stakeholders, on the margins of the meeting.

#### **6. Hybrid Meetings**

- 6.1 Hybrid meetings are challenging for those participating remotely. If they are used, consideration should be given to whether the usual UN timings for meetings are appropriate, given they might cause difficulties for those in different time zones. For example, a two-hour break between meetings in the middle of the night is frustrating. Where possible hybrid and virtual meetings should be compressed and held over as few hours as reasonably possible. Timings should be strictly adhered to: our delegation members have experienced many situations where they have woken up for a 4am meeting, for example, only to hear that the timing changed while they were asleep. We also observe that online participants in hybrid meetings can on occasion be overlooked by facilitators.



**7. Appropriate use of virtual and hybrid meetings**

- 7.1 New Zealand believes that virtual meetings are particularly well suited to conveying information, where there is no negotiation. Webinars that are recorded and that be made available subsequently on the CBD website are useful. We propose virtual and hybrid options would be an appropriate means of conducting the first reading of documents.
- 7.2 New Zealand further considers that options for virtual/hybrid meetings can be optimal for meetings of one or two days, where the cost and time required for remote countries to attend in person could prove prohibitive.
- 7.3 The chat function in virtual meetings can be a beneficial means of sharing information with delegates joining virtually, particularly for those delegates who may regularly encounter connectivity issues that affect their audio quality. It needs to be managed carefully, however, with comments kept to the issue under discussion and kept succinct. It is not a platform for long "interventions".
- 7.4 We propose that where possible, in-person meetings be grouped together to minimise the travel required to attend them. This would minimise travel time, financial costs, and emissions.

FOU-59-9622

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Nigeria

3 July 2023



## NATIONAL BIOSAFETY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (NBMA)

### Federal Ministry of Environment

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(National Parks Services Headquarters Premises), Abuja, FCT  
Email: nbma@nbma.gov.ng, biosafetyng@gmail.com  
Tel: +234 818 080 5451

NBMA/ODG/061/III

30<sup>th</sup> June 2023


#### The Executive Secretary

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity  
United Nations Environment Programme  
413 Saint-Jacques Street, Suite 800  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

#### RE: SUBMISSION OF VIEWS AND EXPERIENCE ON PARTICIPATING IN OR CONDUCTING VIRTUAL AND HYBRID MEETINGS

The National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA), Nigeria wishes to commend the expeditious adjustments made by the Secretariat, which allowed the convening of a number of meetings in a virtual/hybrid setting during the pandemic period, which rendered in-person meetings impracticable.

2. While the adjustment made during the pandemic situation allowed for the full and effective participation of Parties, to promote transparent and inclusive processes under the Convention and the Protocols, it also generated some inconveniences, including the limitations with regard to decision-making.
3. The followings were some of the inconveniences experienced by Nigerian participants on conducting virtual and hybrid meetings held in 2021 and 2022:
  - i. Cost of data;
  - ii. Network connectivity;
  - iii. Distraction due to proximity to office;
  - iv. Limitations with regard to decision-making;
  - v. Limitation of intervention for virtual participants in a hybrid setting.
4. In view of the above, we wish to kindly recommend that the secretariat:
  - i. Provides registered virtual participants with stipend to support data cost;
  - ii. Afforts time to more virtual participants for intervention.
5. Please accept the assurances of my highest regards as I await your kind response.

  
**Bello Scholastica (Mrs.)**  
 for: Director-General/CPB National Focal Point

Website: [www.nbma.gov.ng](http://www.nbma.gov.ng)

Switzerland

15 May 2023



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of the Environment, Transport,  
Energy and Communications DETEC

Federal Office for the Environment FOEN  
International Affairs Division

May 2023

## Submission by Switzerland on views and experience on virtual meetings

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File: BAFU-061.6-02.3-03-03-3/2/1

Switzerland thanks the Executive Secretary for the notification 2023-027 inviting Parties and others to submit their views and experience regarding virtual and hybrid meetings in 2021 and 2022. This submission contains comments of Switzerland regarding the points raised in notification 2023-027, but does not prejudice the Swiss position in the relevant upcoming meetings of the Convention on Biological Diversity

Based on the experience of virtual and hybrid meetings, held under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2021 and 2022, Switzerland is of the view that a virtual format should be considered for future CBD meetings (or parts of future CBD meetings) wherever appropriate and of value, as they offer many advantages, including reducing carbon footprints and reducing the number of days that participants spend travelling and as they are in compliance with the Rules of Procedures applied by the CBD. The latter provide flexibility with regard to organization of meetings. Rule 3 gives the Secretariat the ability to make "other appropriate arrangements" for a session "in consultation with the Parties."

When organizing virtual meetings, the full inclusivity, participation, and representation of all delegations must be ensured, including through the effective management of time zone differences, which can place a special strain on the resources of small delegations.

In the view of Switzerland, virtual meetings can be appropriate and of value not only when used to share information and exchange views (e.g. in the form of a first reading) but also for virtual decision making in areas where no complex negotiations are needed, and on issues to be procedurally transmitted to the higher bodies for their formal adoption.



BAFU-D-1CB13401/738

United Kingdom

9 May 2023



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

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Executive Secretary  
Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity  
World Trade Centre  
413 St Jacques Street, Suite 800  
Montreal, QC H2Y 1N9

Date: 9 May 2023

Dear Executive Secretary

**Submission of views and experience on participating in or conducting virtual and hybrid meetings**

The UK recognises the challenges of the covid pandemic and is grateful for the efforts made by the Secretariat to continue to conduct meetings throughout 2021 and 2022 using virtual and hybrid platforms.

The UK acknowledges concerns that have been raised about equitable participation and accessibility barriers in virtual and hybrid meetings, particularly regards connectivity, technical issues and time zones.

Although we recognise that virtual and hybrid working are not perfect solutions, they can allow for greater engagement and lower costs for some delegations by allowing delegates not attending in person to follow or participate in discussions remotely, and they present a carbon benefit in terms of fewer international flights.

First readings might be particularly well-suited to fully virtual or hybrid meetings. These sessions are typically limited to an exchange of general positions, without detailed negotiation of text. If these were conducted online ahead of in-person meetings, this could minimize the length and cost of subsequent in-person meetings.

Overall, the work of the Convention and its Protocols must remain inclusive, and the UK supports efforts to ensure this in all meetings regardless of format.

Yours sincerely

Elif Skinner  
UK CBD National Focal Point

[elif.skinner@defra.gov.uk](mailto:elif.skinner@defra.gov.uk)



**B. SUBMISSIONS FROM ORGANIZATIONS**

<b>G-BIKE</b>	15 June 2023
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San Michele all'Adige, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**To:**  
*Executive Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity*

**Object:**  
*Views and comments on hybrid and virtual meetings in 2021-2022*

Dear Madame/Sir,  
G-BIKE's experience in conducting virtual and hybrid meetings in 2021 and 2022 has been pretty extensive. In fact, in this period we organised a series of webinars targeting mainly CBD National Focal Point to explain the relevance of the genetic dimension of biodiversity.

We think that there is a striking difference between virtual and hybrid meetings. The latter tend to be less effective, more chaotic and very often biased towards the most represented group of people (either in person or online). On top that, hybrid meetings require proper technical support which is not always available and of good quality.

Nonetheless, there are several circumstances in which hybrid meetings are a valuable option such as: taking decisions in which a quorum is requested, accommodating specific familiar requests, favouring the access of people from more remote areas. However, hybrid meetings inherently creates inequalities between participants which, according to our experience, in the long run should be avoided.

Virtual meetings work really very well when the people already have had the chance to meet in person and to know each other. For instance, updating and taking decisions in projects can significantly benefit from virtual meetings. To this end, we experienced that preparing in advance the agenda and all the relevant documentation makes it easy to conduct a virtual meeting in a pre defined time slot. In our experience, virtual meetings are more effective if limited to a maximum of 1.5 hours.

As an organization working in biodiversity conservation, we're strongly advocating the increasing use of virtual meetings to reduce carbon footprint. To this end we would like to advance a proposal. When planning meetings it would be advisable to allocate more days for the first meeting which should be conducted only IRL. Spending more days together would allow people to better know each other and to discuss in more detail the different topics, especially in terms of future activities planning. The following meetings can be run remotely, better if periodically (e.g. bi-monthly). We think that each organization should try to have a large IRL meeting only once a year. As a matter of fact, long distance flights are posing a serious threat to the environment and by becoming increasingly expensive are determining a sort of census exclusion. And, last but not least, it would be important to be as consistent as possible. It's hard to convince people that some

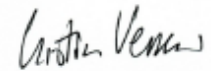


changes in our behaviours are needed (for instance by reducing long distance flights) when we're the first to not change our behaviour.

We're looking forward to further discussion and we would like to thank the Secretariat for offering us this opportunity

Best regards

Chair of the Action

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cristiano Vernesi".

dr. Cristiano Vernesi

<p><b>Local and Subnational Governments Major Group (LSNG)</b></p>	<p>28 April 2023</p>
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**David Cooper**  
**Acting Executive Secretary**  
**Convention on Biological Diversity**

**RE: Submission of views and experience on participating in or conducting virtual and hybrid meetings (Ref: SCBD/OES/DC/WDY/IIM/90891)**

Mr Cooper,

*Noting decisions 15/18, CP-10/8 and NP-4/9, we hereby express our views and experience on participating in or conducting virtual and hybrid meetings. This submission is made on behalf of the Advisory Committee on Local Governments and Biodiversity of the Convention on Biological Diversity (coordinated by ICLEI- Local Governments for Sustainability) and the Advisory Committee on Subnational Governments and Biodiversity of the Convention on Biological Diversity (coordinated by Regions4 and the government of Quebec), for the Local and Subnational Governments Major Group (LSNG).*

- Virtual meetings maximize attendance and support the engagement of subnational and local governments, as well as some other Major Groups, developing countries and Small Island Development States. Especially when in-person meetings have limited capacity on invitations and these consider in first instance High Level participation.
- Virtual meetings have online tools as chat boxes that serve to have organized interventions and ensure all voices are heard. From our experience as a major group, it was easier to see which Parties were supportive of our comments via the chat. We were also able to submit our views in writing more easily.
- We appreciated that the SCBD and co-chairs always made sure to try to give the floor to the major groups, but we've noticed that observers had very limited or no chance to intervene during the virtual meetings.
- One of the main issues of virtual meetings is disparities in connectivity. However, considering previous experiences from regions and cities, this challenge can be easily overcome.
- The main difficulties of having virtual meetings are;
  - Building trust: online gatherings do not offer the possibility of constructing a trusting relationship necessary at negotiations or the continuity to have bilateral / informal meetings.

- Attentiveness: at this type of events, attendees are addressing different issues while participating at the meeting for a very prolonged time. During the virtual SBSTTA/SBI for example, it was very difficult to commit to attend daily virtual meetings for such a long period of time without having to deal with other tasks, thus making it more difficult to stay fully committed.
- Accessibility barriers: such as different time zones and access to translation. The selected time zone was more difficult for partners such as California (4am) or Aichi (11pm) than others.
- **Even when virtual meetings encourage attendance and engagement, these are not effective as a negotiation mechanism. Virtual meetings can fulfill better purposes as: preparatory gatherings, capacity building workshops and consultation processes.**

**Third World Network****Submission of views and experience on participating in or conducting virtual and hybrid meetings**

In the efforts to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), its Protocols and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework effectively and in an inclusive manner, there have to be equitable and balanced processes and outcomes.

The nature of the meeting is an important consideration, and there are many different types of meetings ranging from technical workshops and webinars, to small group experts meetings and formal negotiations.

The experience during the COVID-19 pandemic clearly showed that formal virtual negotiations are inequitable for developing countries, and its outcomes lack legitimacy. In many respects, they were also counter productive.

For meetings such as technical workshops, webinars, and such other meetings which are of a non-decision making nature, virtual and hybrid meetings can be a positive development, in view of limited resources and the biodiversity and climate change impact of air travel. Recordings of these meetings must be made available, and inputs that were not able to be adequately addressed due to its virtual nature should be followed up after. Full documentation of these meetings is important to ensure that opportunities for participation are as equitable as possible.

For small group expert meetings, virtual or hybrid meetings can also play a role. Efforts should be made to ensure that participation in such meetings is fully inclusive and equitable, particularly for developing country Parties and observers such as indigenous peoples and local communities, smallholder farmers, women and youth, such as taking time zone differences, internet connectivity and technical capabilities into consideration.

Formal virtual or hybrid negotiations will disadvantage developing country Parties, which face challenges in participating effectively and dynamically. They would be inequitable for many reasons including the digital divide affecting internet connectivity and technical capability, and limited capacity and resources, particularly for those in developing countries or in rural areas. There are also challenges for regional and other coordination. In addition, time zone differences may disproportionately disadvantage a particular region while inclusivity and transparency in how decisions are made would also be impacted.

There has to be full and effective participation of developing country Parties as well as of observers, in particular indigenous peoples and local communities, smallholder

farmers, women, and youth. The lack of interpretation in these meetings has already been a challenge and unfairly privileges those of us who can communicate in English.

If our objective is to ensure equitable inclusivity and participation in virtual or hybrid meetings/negotiations, particularly with respect to the needs of developing country Parties, and of indigenous peoples and local communities, the following issues, inter alia, need to be addressed:

### **1. Decision-making on important procedural matters regarding the conduct of virtual or hybrid negotiations**

- Decision-making on important procedural matters, including on the adoption of final documents, should be decided democratically by all Parties. There should be clearly agreed parameters, principles and/or safeguards for decision-making on important procedural matters.
- Any procedure for advancing documents to the next stage in a virtual or hybrid negotiations should not circumvent any reservation of positions that Parties may have.

### **2. Issues related to convening virtual or hybrid meetings/negotiations**

- Pre-recorded statements and written submissions should be played or read out by the Secretariat during the virtual or hybrid meeting if there are connection problems, as participants in attendance may not view pre-recorded statements or read written submissions.
- Parties with poor Internet connections should have the option of using the United Nations Country Office in their country or region to log on to the virtual or hybrid meeting, and additional facilitation or funding should be made available for developing country Parties to be able to access these arrangements.
- In the case that a representative of a Party is unable to make an intervention in a particular session for technical reasons, such as poor connectivity, and if such a situation was not noticed, followed up, and resolved at the time, the representative should be able to notify the Secretariat of the situation by email or phone at the earliest opportunity, and there should be guarantees that the intervention will be taken into account.
- The issue of digital security and privacy is very important, particularly with respect to regional group consultations. In the interest of transparency, information on these arrangements should be made available.
- Efforts should be made to address the structural technical and connectivity issues. At a minimum, there should be financial support made available to developing country Parties and accredited civil society organizations for hardware and software upgrades, for accessing the highest bandwidth available



- Having English as the only language for the work of the contact groups and other types of informal groups is inequitable for the majority non-English speaking world, an issue that civil society has raised many times. There are already many disadvantages faced by many developing country Parties in virtual negotiations. And there are vast financial savings from virtual as compared to face-to-face sessions. As an issue of equity, and to help level the playing field, some of the financial savings from virtual sessions should be used for the interpretation of contact and other informal groups and translation of documents.

**C. EXPERIENCE OF SOME MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS AND A UNEP STUDY**

<b>Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions (BRS)</b>	14 December 2023
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**Experience with hybrid and online meetings under the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions in the period 2020-2023**

The subsidiary bodies of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions have various experiences with hybrid and online meetings. Before COVID time, there was a longstanding practice under the Basel Convention for a limited membership subsidiary body to meet face-to-face or by electronic means, depending on the availability of financial resources, and that it may work by electronic means, i.e. by email correspondence.<sup>1</sup> This practice has also been used in the last few years under the Stockholm Convention.<sup>2</sup>

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the bodies under all three Conventions adjusted the format of their meetings and moved to online meetings.

Below is information on the convening of the meetings of the BRS Conferences of the Parties (COPs) and of one open-ended subsidiary body under the Basel Convention (the Open-ended working Group) during the pandemic. In a third section, complemented by an annex, information is provided on the current approach in the Secretariat regarding the format of meetings of BRS subsidiary bodies. A standard operating procedure (SOP) on the matter is under development.

Over the period, the Secretariat communicated extensively with Parties, observers and the Bureaux to provide information and answer queries in relation to the application of the rules of procedures during meetings convened in an online format. No specific legal issue was raised during the 2021 segment of the BRS COPs and the online segment of the OEWG-12 meetings. However, Parties noted the additional costs incurred to organize the online segments due to the meeting platform and larger interpreters' team.

**A. Experiences in 2020-2022**

Due to the COVID-19 situation, during the period 2020-2022, the following meetings were held in two segments (online and face-to-face) on an exceptional basis:

- The 2021-2022 meeting of the COPs;
- The twelfth meeting of the Open-ended Working Group of the Basel Convention.
  - a. The 2021-2022 meetings of the COPs

The meetings of the COPs which were initially scheduled in July 2021 could not be organized as originally planned as face-to-face meetings. The BRS COPs Bureau therefore agreed to organize the meetings in two segments, with an online segment over 5 days in 2021 to adopt a set of prioritized and time sensitive decisions<sup>3</sup> aimed at continuing the work of the Conventions in 2022, followed by a face-to-face segment held over a two-week period in 2022 to take up the items of the agendas not considered or concluded during the online segment. The COPs at their online segment confirmed that the face-to-face resumed meetings would be held on from 6 to 17 June 2022, in Geneva.

To respond to the issue of connectivity in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, a communication allowance was provided to eligible participants upon request and subject to the availability of resources. BRS had developed its own internal policy on reimbursement of communication costs for online meetings using a reference the policy that had been issued by UNEP at the time. The sessions of the online segment gave specific considerations to differences in time zones and were shorter in length as compared to usual face-to-face sessions.

<sup>1</sup> This is for instance the case for the Partnership on Plastic Waste working group, the Basel Convention Partnership on Household Waste working group, the various Basel Convention intersessional working groups on the development or updating of technical guidelines.

<sup>2</sup> The intersessional working group on polychlorinated biphenyls works by electronic means and, subject to the availability of resources, through a face-to-face meeting.

<sup>3</sup> Mostly Programme of work and budget of the conventions, elections, Stockholm Convention financial mechanism and resources and dates and venue of the face-to-face resumed meetings.

During their joint meeting on 6 May 2022, the BRS COPs Bureau agreed that online participation would be allowed in the face-to-face segment of the COPs, taking due considerations of reported cases of COVID-19 as well as travel and venue-related restrictions in some countries. According to that agreement, online participation was allowed, upon request to the Secretariat by a Party or an observer, in the following two instances:

- Registered delegates of a Party or observer organization face COVID-19 restrictions that prevent any representative of the Party or organization to attend the meetings in person;
- A registered delegate of a Party or observer tests positive for COVID-19 upon departure, arrival or during the COPs and is thus prevented from entering the venue; and he or she is the only delegate from that particular Party or observer present in the meetings.

In addition, the Bureau agreed that all other meeting participants will be provided with an online access to view the meetings, meaning that only representatives participating in the meetings in person would exercise the right, as appropriate, to seek the floor, make a proposal or a motion, raise a point of order and participate in decision-making. The COPs agreed to proceed along those lines.

Under those parameters, only one Party – China – met the first criteria mentioned above and participated online in the 2022 COPs.

#### b. The twelfth meeting of the Open-ended Working Group of the Basel Convention

On 9 July 2020, the Bureau of the OEWG of the Basel Convention agreed to hold the OEWG-12 in two components, consisting of an online segment and a face-to-face segment. The online segment consisted of two online sessions held over two days in September 2020 to essentially hear briefings on the progress in the intersessional work and invite further comments that were to be taken into account in the further intersessional work to be undertaken. To respond to the issue of connectivity in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, a communication allowance was provided to eligible participants upon request and subject to the availability of resources, under the same modalities as that provided to during the 2022 segment of the COPs as described above. The sessions of the online segment gave specific considerations to differences in time zones and were shorter in length as compared to usual face-to-face sessions.

Through a written procedure after the OEWG-12 Bureau meeting on 18 November 2021, the OEWG Bureau agreed that the face-to-face segment of OEWG-12 would be held over 5 days in April 2022, at Gigiri, Nairobi, Kenya. A possibility for online participation in the meeting was provided, for those unable to attend in person due to the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic. The entire meeting, including plenary sessions and contact/drafting group meetings were connected to the online meeting platform. No specific justification was required from participants when requesting online participation, and one of the co-chairs of the meeting actually co-chaired the meeting through the online meeting platform.

#### B. Situation in 2023

With the return to the new normal, the 2023 COPs did not see the need to provide any opportunity for online participation at future meetings of the COPs. Same for the OEWG, no provisions for online participation were agreed to by the COPs in the OEWG programme of work and budget for 2023-2024. The modality to work by electronic means for a number of subsidiary bodies will continue in the coming years as confirmed in the 2023 BRS COPs decisions.

During the COVID-19 period, a lot of experience was gained with the organization of hybrid meetings and remote participation which resulted in various benefits for the Secretariat and the Conventions, e.g. allowing wider participation, and reducing environmental footprint.

In light of the experience gained during the COVID-19 period and the mandate for some of the subsidiary bodies to work by electronic means, as well as in view of providing a consistent approach for the organization of meetings under the BRS conventions, the Secretariat has developed an interim approach for determining the format of meetings of ad-hoc subsidiary bodies and experts. This approach does not apply to meetings of the COPs and standing subsidiary bodies whose format is specified by the COPs, as specified in the programme of

work and budget. The detailed approach is set out in the annex and will be complemented by a standard operating procedure which is currently under development.

In a nutshell, the decision on the format of a meeting needs to take into account the following considerations:

- Meetings are organized in the format agreed by the COPs;
- For meetings of the ad-hoc subsidiary bodies which are mandated to work electronically, the format (online, hybrid or face-to-face) will be contingent on the availability of financial resources;
- For meetings that meet the conditions for going ahead as face-to-face, the Secretariat would apply the following principles:
  - Avoid hybrid arrangements if funding to organize a fully-fledged face-to-face meeting is sufficient. However, exceptions can be granted (see below);
  - Consider providing online viewer mode arrangements if conducive to the success of the work of the body, taking into account possible financial implications;
  - Take into account the past practice of the body in relation to the format of its meetings and the use of online settings.
- Taking those principles into account, the Secretariat will formulate a proposal on the format of a meeting which will be reviewed and endorsed by the chair/co-chairs (or by the Secretariat in the absence of the chair/co-chairs at the time of the decision-making). The body would also endorse, electronically with a simplified approach of “no objection”, by a certain deadline indicated by the Secretariat.
- After the invitation letters to the meeting are sent out outlining the format of the meeting, exceptions to the general approach of “no online participation in face-to-face meetings” can be considered if a request for online participation is received from a member of the body who justifies his/her inability to attend the meeting.
- If online participation is agreed, the Secretariat will bring the possibility for online participation to the attention of the entire body including members/experts and observers.

## Annex

### Approach for determining the format of meetings of ad-hoc subsidiary bodies and experts

1. As a general rule, meetings are organized in the format agreed by the COPs, as specified in COP decisions or in the adopted programmes of work as set out in the budget factsheets.
2. For meetings of some of the ad-hoc subsidiary bodies which are mandated to work electronically, the format (online, hybrid or face-to-face) will be contingent on the availability of financial resources.
3. For meetings that meet the conditions for going ahead as face-to-face, the Secretariat would apply the following principles:
  - a. Avoid hybrid arrangements if funding to organize a fully-fledged face-to-face meeting is sufficient. This aims at ensuring that all members/experts have equal opportunities to participate in the meeting proceedings. However, exceptions can be granted (see paragraphs 6 and 7 below);
  - b. Consider providing online viewer mode arrangements if conducive to the success of the work of the body, taking into account possible financial implications. This aims at promoting a wider audience to BRS meetings and keeping a level of engagement with participants/members who are not able to physically attend the face-to-face meetings;
  - c. Take into account the past practice of the body in relation to the format of its meetings and the use of online settings.
4. Taking those principles into account, the programme officer will formulate a proposal on the format of a meeting, at least 2 months prior to the dates for the meeting, to the extent possible. This includes the review and endorsement of the proposed format by the Branch Chief, by the chairs/co-chairs (following the process set out in paragraph 5) and ultimately by the Executive Secretary through the clearance of invitation letters.
5. The decision on the format of a meeting is to be made by the chair/co-chairs based on the information provided by the Secretariat or by the Secretariat in the absence of the chair/co-chairs at the time of the decision-making. The body would also endorse, electronically with a simplified approach of "no objection" by a certain deadline indicated by the responsible PO, the approach as necessary (i.e., no objection or major concerns are raised by members/experts).
6. After the invitation letters to the meeting are sent out outlining the format of the meeting, in line with paragraphs 3-5, exceptions to the general approach of "no online participation in face-to-face meetings" can be considered if a request for online participation is received from a member of the body who justifies his/her inability to attend the meeting.<sup>4</sup>
7. In such exceptional circumstances, the decision to respond positively to the request and to consequently provide online participation in the meeting (in order to ensure equal opportunities to participate) is to be made by the chair/co-chairs based on information provided by the Secretariat, or by the Secretariat in the absence of a

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<sup>4</sup> Exceptions can only be considered on the basis of requests from members/experts not observers. In addition, the Secretariat and the Chair/co-chairs may authorize an invited expert unable to participate in a face-to-face meeting to make an intervention through the online platform.



chair/co-chairs. Information to be considered when deciding on the provision of online participation includes for instance:

- a. The request(s) received and the reasons provided by the member/expert justifying an inability to attend the meeting;
  - b. The impact of online participation on the successful running of the meeting and on its outcome;
  - c. The logistical implications;<sup>5</sup>
  - d. The financial implications.<sup>6</sup>
8. If online participation is agreed, the Secretariat will bring the possibility for online participation to the attention of the entire body including members/experts and observers.

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<sup>5</sup>For instance, requests that are not received sufficiently in advance of the meeting dates (e.g., 1 month prior to the meeting dates) may not be acted on.

<sup>6</sup> Some initial considerations of the logistical and financial implications of allowing full online participation to a meeting may already be assessed during the early stage of planning.

<b>Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)</b>	15 December 2023
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The relevant experience of CITES is highlighted in document SC77 Doc. 12:  
<https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/SC/77/agenda/E-SC77-12.pdf>

THE CONVENTION ON WETLANDS  
62nd meeting of the Standing Committee  
Gland, Switzerland, 4-8 September 2023

SC62 Doc.12

### Report of the Secretariat on enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Convention

#### Actions requested:

The Standing Committee is invited to consider two possible approaches to enhance collaboration between Contracting Parties intersessionally, and instruct the Secretariat on which approach to follow in preparing a plan to be presented to the 63rd meeting of the Standing Committee.

#### Background

1. This report provides a response to the request made in Resolution XIV.3 on *The effectiveness and efficiency of the Convention on Wetlands*, paragraph 12, which:
 

*INSTRUCTS the Secretariat to propose approaches, including possible online systems, and in particular a closed members' portal, continuously updated member address lists, and further improved access to online documents that would enhance collaboration between Contracting Parties intersessionally, including, but not limited to, in working groups, and in the preparation of draft resolutions by allowing Parties to submit and provide comments on draft resolutions. The Secretariat is instructed to report its proposals about such technologies, including the costs and benefits of such systems and how the proposal manages any risk of creating a participation gap between Parties with different levels of internet access, to SC62, so that Parties can assess whether there is interest in investing Convention resources in implementing such technologies as a means to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the Convention, and if so, recommend this matter is given priority in the deliberations of the Subgroup on Finance;*
2. The request made in paragraph 12 of Resolution XIV.3 covers a wide range of potential technologies and processes. The Secretariat has therefore secured the services of OneOff-Tech, a firm that specializes in the implementation of digital technologies for knowledge management with relevant experience with multinational organizations and processes.
3. Resolution XIV.12 authorized the use of CHF 10,000 from the unspent funds allocated to the work of the Effectiveness Working Group for the 2019-2021 triennium to fulfil the mandate of the Resolution XIV.3.
4. A call for proposals to undertake an analysis as described in paragraph 12 of Resolution XIV.3 was advertised through the Convention and IUCN websites. Proposals were submitted by five entities. The Secretariat evaluated the proposals based on their relevant experience, capacity to deliver and value for money, following IUCN's procurement policies and guidelines. OneOff-

Tech had the highest score during the evaluation process and was subsequently contracted for the assignment.

5. As part of its assignment, OneOff-Tech undertook a review of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and other similar organizations to understand how they have addressed the collaboration challenges expressed by Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands. The review revealed that each MEA utilizes different digital tools for supporting the processes of drafting, editing and commenting on documents, and for searching for and retrieving information and collaborating within working groups. However, none of the MEAs has comprehensively solved the issue of streamlining remote collaboration through digital technologies. The findings of this review are included in the Report *Review of the mechanisms to facilitate virtual collaboration among the Convention on Wetlands' Contracting Parties*<sup>1</sup>.
6. The Secretariat explored the IUCN Motions Platform, which is custom-built specifically for IUCN needs and processes. The Secretariat concluded that it does not meet the needs of the Convention as described in paragraph 12 of Resolution XIV.3. However, the Secretariat has taken several lessons and ideas from discussions with IUCN, such as the use of an online submission form for draft resolutions, to inform the proposed process of submitting draft resolutions to COP15.
7. The consultant's project report and the Secretariat's review of the IUCN Motions Platform have provided an expert view and recommendations on which the Secretariat has based two possible approaches and next steps for consideration by the Standing Committee.

#### Proposed approaches

8. The Secretariat acknowledges the varying opinions among Parties regarding the desired functionality, ease of use, and costs associated with an online collaboration system. To address this, the Secretariat proposes two distinct approaches for consideration by the Standing Committee. The first approach leverages existing systems within the Secretariat, enabling rapid implementation at a minimal cost. The second approach offers a more integrated solution with enhanced functionality, but would require investment and piloting before full implementation.
9. Under the first approach (approach 1), 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.
10. As an example, for the preparation of a draft resolution submitted by a Party or working group, this approach would follow these steps:
  - a. The Secretariat creates a dedicated space on SharePoint and grants access to the lead author of a draft resolution;
  - b. The lead author uploads a first draft and generates a link to the online document;
  - c. The lead author determines the recipient list(s) to whom the link will be sent for commenting on the document;

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.ramsar.org/document/review-of-the-mechanisms-to-facilitate-virtual-collaboration-among-the-convention-on>.

- d. The selected individuals and/or groups open the link and 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.
11. 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 Parties.
12. The second approach (approach 2) would provide relevant contacts (individual members within a defined group) with access to a secure platform that requires controlled login credentials. This platform would ensure a secure access to both contacts and documents. Within this platform, members of groups would be able to communicate through chat and posts, specifically within the context of a task(s) or document(s). Additionally, a collaborative document-editing feature would be available. To maintain control and privacy, access levels could be defined for members, granting them the ability to comment and/or directly edit text based on their designated permissions.
13. As an example, for the preparation of a draft resolution submitted by a Party or working group, this approach would follow these steps:
- a. The lead author of a draft resolution logs into the platform;
  - b. The lead author uploads a first draft of a resolution to a dedicated space on that platform, which has been prepared by the Secretariat;
  - c. The lead author defines the access rights of other members (users of the platform) to the draft, defining their level of access to the document (read/write/comment);
  - d. The lead author posts a message on the platform to notify the identified members about the availability of the draft and provide instructions on how to access it;
  - e. Depending on a member's level of access, they may edit or comment on the draft;
  - f. Communication concerning the draft takes place through discussion threads and chats within the platform; and
  - g. Once a defined period of time for edits and comments has ended, the lead author consolidates and finalizes the document.
14. The benefits of this second approach would be enhanced functionality that would enable Parties to access multiple documents within the same space, both comment on and edit documents, and engage in discussion threads. The ability to edit documents would be the key element of enhanced functionality available with this approach. This approach would require setting up a suite of tools that integrate communication (written, potentially voice and video), maintaining spaces for contact lists and document storage. It would involve creating user logins with controlled access rights based on defined user roles such as the ability to edit. Due to its higher complexity, a clear definition of processes would be necessary, including a rights matrix which would define which individuals had which rights (e.g. the right to edit), review of workflows and naming conventions. Maintaining such a system would require resources from the Secretariat, training and ongoing support to users. Depending on the choice of tools, additional licenses and/or hosting fees would occur. Should Parties want to pursue this approach, it is recommended that the approach be piloted by an established working group to



assess the utilization of available tools, overall value provided, and user feedback of the approach to determine the suitability of the approach before broader implementation.

15. A matrix comparing the functionality, costs and support required for the two options is presented as Annex 1.
16. It is important to note that neither approach fully overcomes the challenge of working in the three official languages of the Convention. While there are multiple solutions for live interpretation of virtual meetings including Kudo and Zoom, which have been used by the Secretariat, online collaboration on document in multiple languages remains difficult. To the knowledge of the Secretariat, OneOff-Tech and the interviewed MEAs, no such tools are available.

**Recommendation of the Secretariat**

17. It is the view of the Secretariat that the needs and interests of Parties, as described in paragraph 12 of Resolution XIV.3, can be largely met through approach 1 utilizing existing tools and resources. The Secretariat proposes, subject to Standing Committee approval, presenting a plan to the 63rd meeting of the Standing Committee (SC63) for implementing and utilizing this approach to enhance collaboration in the preparation of draft resolutions for consideration by COP15.

**Annex 1**

**Matrix comparing the functionality, costs and support required for the two proposed approaches**

	<b>Approach 1</b>	<b>Required support</b>	<b>Approach 2</b>	<b>Required support</b>
<b>Contacts</b>	Contacts available on the CRM	Medium - Creation of online lists for consultation	Contacts available in platform linked to users	High - Synchronization of lists from CRM to platform
<b>Access</b>	Link gives access	Low – Creation of link	Login to a platform	High - User management and support
<b>Upload draft</b>	Upload through link	Low	Upload to platform	Low
<b>Enable commenting / editing</b>	Link gives access to commenting	Low – Definition of rights per link	Commenting and editing based on assigned role	Medium – Maintenance of roles and training for lead
<b>Communication</b>	Email and online meetings	Medium – Known communication methods	Discussion threads within the platform	High - Training and support for all users

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REVISED LAW DIVISION STUDY ON VIRTUAL MEETINGS (and a summary of practice)

Prepared in consultation with the Secretariats of the UNEP Governing Bodies and Multilateral Environment Agreements and UNEP Regional Offices, APRIL 2021

(Internal document)

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