

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



Seventy-fourth meeting of the Standing Committee
Lyon, France, 7-11 March 2022

Strategic matters

LANGUAGE STRATEGY FOR THE CONVENTION

1. This document has been prepared by the Secretariat and the final section entitled "Recommendations of the Finance and Budget Subcommittee" has been submitted by the Finance and Budget Subcommittee.
2. At its 18th meeting (CoP18, Geneva, 2019), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decision 18.30 on *Language strategy for the Convention* as follows:

18.30 Directed to the Standing Committee

The Standing Committee shall, with the assistance of the Secretariat:

- a) *consider implications of adding Arabic, Chinese and Russian to the working languages of the Convention, including for the administration, budget, implementation and effectiveness of the Convention;*
 - b) *particularly consider benefits and challenges specific to adding each one of these languages as working languages of the Convention, taking note of document CoP18 Doc. 8 on Draft resolution on language strategy for the Convention and of United Nations General Assembly resolution 71/328 on Multilingualism; and*
 - c) *report its conclusions and recommendations to the 19th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.*
3. On 28 September 2020, the Standing Committee requested the Secretariat to prepare an analysis of the issues and tasked the Finance and Budget Subcommittee to provide advice to the Standing Committee based on the analysis prepared by the Secretariat.
4. At its 73rd meeting (SC73, online, May 2021), the Standing Committee "*requested the Secretariat to prepare a more detailed analysis of the administrative and cost implications of different language strategies for the Secretariat and Parties outlined in document SC73 Doc. 11 and to submit it to the Finance and Budget Subcommittee (FBSC). The Committee invited China and the Russian Federation to join the FBSC as observers when it further considers the Secretariat's detailed analysis on the proposed language strategies and any other approach the FBSC may decide in its discussion. The Committee agreed to consider at its 74th meeting the results of the FBSC's discussions based on the Secretariat's detailed analysis.*"
5. The present document responds to the request made by the Standing Committee at SC73 and provides an update to document SC73 Doc. 11 (Rev. 1). It is structured as follows:
 - a) administrative and cost implications for the Secretariat of adding Arabic, Chinese and Russian as working languages of the Convention;

- b) an overview of the benefits and challenges (including administrative and cost implications) for CITES Parties of adding Arabic, Chinese and Russian;
- c) a proposed strategy to identify documents that would need to be translated in Arabic, Chinese and Russian in order to facilitate and improve the implementation of the Convention by Management and Scientific Authorities; and
- d) a third option that focuses on the provision of language services in Arabic, Chinese and Russian only during meetings of the Conference of the Parties.

Administrative and cost implications for the Secretariat

6. As noted by the Secretariat in its comments on document [CoP18 Doc. 8](#), the proposal to include Arabic, Russian and Chinese as working languages of the Convention, if adopted, would have significant cost implications and would require additional core funding for language services and human resources within the Secretariat. The estimates proposed below are based on the assumption that previous meeting documents available on the CITES website would not be translated, with the exception of the Convention and the valid Resolutions and Decisions.
7. In the respective Rules of Procedure, Parties have decided that, for the Conference of the Parties and its permanent committees, the working languages of the Convention are English, French and Spanish. Should Arabic, Chinese and Russian be added as working languages, these Rules of Procedure would need to be amended.
8. Based on the current Rules of Procedure, the Secretariat has received financial resources to provide for language services and human resources to cover the three working languages for the Secretariat and the Convention in the triennium budgets. The total cost of USD 2,479,136 linked to the provision of languages services for the triennium 2020-2022 in English, French and Spanish can be found in Annex 2 to Resolution Conf. 18.1 on *Financing and the costed programme of work for the Secretariat for the triennium 2020-2022*, as per below details:

Existing cost for language services for three languages (as per Resolution Conf. 18.1 on triennium 2020-2022) in USD				
Description / Year	2020	2021	2022	Total triennium
Translation services	365,000	365,000	505,000	1,235,000
Interpretation services to CoP, SC, AC and PC	110,500	110,500	205,900	426,900
Human resources (1 P-3 Documentation Officer at 75% and 1 Documents Assistant at 100%)	272,412	272,412	272,412	817,236
TOTAL	747,912	747,912	983,312	2,479,136

9. If three additional working languages were to be introduced, further core funded resources would be required for translation, interpretation and human resources. To get an estimate of additional permanent human resources which would be required, the Secretariat consulted other Secretariats of Conventions with six official languages. At a minimum, an increase by one Documents Assistant at 100% and an Information Technology Assistant at 50% to maintain the website in three additional languages would be necessary within the Secretariat to process the documents for meetings.
10. The Secretariat believes that the transaction costs for the Secretariat to operate in three additional languages should not be underestimated. The volume of decisions and documentation produced for and by CITES meetings keeps increasing (see document [CoP18 Doc. 7.1](#)) and the inclusion of three additional working languages would strain existing human resources and would impact other services, including the staff in charge of human resources and communications, among others.

11. As requested by the Committee at SC73, the Secretariat expands below on the administrative implications and internal transaction costs for the Secretariat to operate in three additional languages:
- a) The CITES Secretariat currently has no capacity to verify the accuracy of the translations into English, French and Spanish as two revisor posts for French and Spanish have remained unfilled since the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP15, The Hague, 2007) due to lack of funding in the core budget. As a mitigation measure, the CITES Secretariat is employing experienced freelance translators, the majority of whom have worked for CITES for over ten years and is actively expanding its roster of junior translators, allowing them to gain the necessary CITES experience. It would take several years to develop a similar roster of experienced translators in Arabic, Chinese and Russian. However, should the issue of the quality of the translation be a priority for CITES Parties, the creation of three revisor posts for Arabic, Chinese and Russian might be necessary. These revisor posts at P-4 level would represent a budget of USD 636,801 per year and USD 1,910,403 per triennium. This cost is reflected in the table in paragraph 12.
 - b) The adoption of Arabic, Chinese and Russian would also entail doubling the number of translator and interpreter contracts processed by the Secretariat. The engagement of translator consultants through the UN competitive recruitment system, Inspira, and the issuance of contracts is handled by six staff within the CITES Secretariat (the Documentation Officer requesting the contract, an Administrative Assistant advertising the consultancy and helping select the translators, the requisitioner, the buyer, the Administrative Officer and the Secretary-General authorizing the contract) and by staff within the United Nations Office at Nairobi paid through the CITES Programme Support Cost retained by the United Nations Environment Programme. The adoption of three additional languages would thus entail an increase in the current heavy workload within the CITES Secretariat and this increase in workload cannot be absorbed within existing resources. A possible solution would be to use the services of the United Nations Office at Geneva that charges USD 240 per contract issuance. The Secretariat issued 33 contracts for Spanish translators and 33 contracts for French translators from 2019 to 2021; an estimated total of 99 contracts would need to be issued for translators into Arabic, Chinese and Russian at a cost of USD 23,760 for a triennium to pay for this service.
 - c) For the last two meetings of the Conference of the Parties, the Secretariat had to hire an additional temporary conference staff six months before the meetings to help handle the ever-increasing volume of CoP documents. In order to cope with the increase of work volume in six languages prior to a CoP meeting, a total of three temporary staff would be needed. This cost is reflected in the table in paragraph 12 under internal transaction costs.
 - d) The final significant administrative impact would concern the staff of the Secretariat more widely, should it be expected to operate and answer queries in all six languages. The Secretariat reminds Parties that the two working languages of the United Nations Secretariat are English and French, but that the CITES Secretariat has also been able to handle queries in Spanish. Should the Secretariat be expected to operate in all six languages, the communications of the Secretariat in Arabic, Chinese and Russian would rely on the availability and the quality of external translators.
12. The cost of the functioning of the Convention in six languages would amount to around USD 7.08 million per triennium (based on costs at the time of writing the present document) and is detailed in the table below:

Estimated cost for language services for six languages (based on cost estimates in Resolution Conf. 18.1) for triennium 2023-2025) in USD		Increase compared to 2020-2022 triennium budget (in USD)
Translation services	2,470,000	1,235,000
Quality control of translations in Arabic, Chinese and Russian (3 Editor/Revisors at P-4 level – optional)	1,910,403	1,910,403
Interpretation services to CoP, SC, AC and PC	853,800	426,900
Human resources (1 P-3 Documentation Officer at 75% and 2.5 General Service staff)	1,451,703	634,467
Development of the CITES website in three additional languages	15,000	15,000
Translation cost of Resolutions and Decisions and of the CITES website in three additional languages	146,000	146,000
Internal transaction cost for the Secretariat		
- Cost of contract issuance for translators	23,760	23,760
- 3 temporary Documentation Conference Staff 6 months before and during the CoP	211,490	211,490
TOTAL	7,082,156	4,603,020

12. Following questions raised at SC73, the Secretariat reviewed all valid resolutions to identify additional translation cost implications for Parties or the Secretariat. In Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP18) on *Compliance and enforcement*, paragraph 9 c), the dedicated portal on the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) should be maintained “in the official languages of the Convention” so this would imply the need to translate the portal in Arabic, Chinese and Russian. In Resolution Conf. 11.19 (Rev. CoP16) on *Identification Manual*, the Identification Manual should be available “in the three working languages of the Convention.” Considering the volume of identification materials available, their translation would come at a high cost.

Arabic, Chinese and Russian among CITES Parties

13. The Secretariat acknowledges the value of increasing the number of working languages of the Convention by including Arabic, Chinese and Russian. Arabic is the official language in 24 Parties and spoken by over 400 million people among the CITES Parties. Chinese is the official language in two countries and spoken by over 1.3 billion people and Russian is the official language in four Parties and spoken by over 150 million people. The introduction of Arabic and Russian as working languages would benefit a significant number of Parties, while the introduction of Chinese would benefit the greatest number of individuals.
14. From a practical perspective, the Secretariat notes that some key texts are already available in Chinese and Russian. According to Article XXV of the Convention, the original text of the Convention exists in Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish and each of these versions shall be equally authentic. At its 16th meeting (Bangkok, 2013), the Conference of the Parties agreed that, at the next extraordinary meeting of the Conference of the Parties, the Secretariat should propose an amendment to the Convention in order to adopt an official text of the Convention in Arabic [see paragraph 3 d) of Resolution Conf. 4.6 (Rev. CoP18) on *Submission of draft resolutions, draft decisions and other documents for meetings of the Conference of the Parties*].

15. The Secretariat notes that, in preparation for a training workshop for Management and Scientific Authorities from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on CITES implementation that was held from 22 to 25 May 2018 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, some key Resolutions were translated into Russian: Resolution Conf. 8.4 (Rev. CoP15) on *National laws for implementation of the Convention*, Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP18) on *Permits and certificates*, Resolution Conf. 16.7 (Rev. CoP17) on *Non-detriment findings*, Resolution Conf. 17.6 on *Prohibiting, preventing, detecting and countering corruption, which facilitates activities conducted in violation of the Convention* and Resolution Conf. 17.8 on *Disposal of illegally traded and confiscated specimens of CITES-listed species* (without the annexes). These are unofficial translations that would need to be revised prior to posting on the CITES website.
16. The Secretariat is also aware that the CITES national authorities of China have translated all Resolutions and Decisions as well as the latest Appendices into the Chinese language from English after each CoP in order to facilitate national implementation.
17. While some strides have been taken to broaden the availability of CITES documentation in Arabic, Chinese and Russian, these efforts have been *ad hoc* and done on a volunteer basis. The adoption of these three additional languages as languages of the Convention would have the following administrative implications for Parties:
 - a) Should the Parties decide to adopt Arabic, Chinese and Russian as official languages of the Convention, this could entail that CITES permits and certificates be produced in those languages. This may represent an enforcement risk and/or longer processing times since most Management Authorities and customs agencies would not be able to read and validate permits and certificates in those languages. Communications between Parties could also potentially be slower, with a possible efficiency repercussion.
 - b) The main cost implications for Parties are twofold:
 - i) for amendment proposals, as indicated in Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP17) on *Criteria for amendment of Appendices I and II*, if an amendment proposal is longer than 12 pages, “the proponent should provide translations into the working languages of the Convention”, and, as indicated in Resolution Conf. 11.21 (Rev. CoP18) on *Use of annotations in Appendices I and II*, Parties are to “ensure that the text [of substantive annotations] is clear and unambiguous in the three working languages of the Convention”; and
 - ii) Management and Scientific Authorities may have to budget for the translation of documents, in particular permits and certificates, they receive in a language they are not able to read or decipher easily.

An incremental language strategy

13. As outlined in the first section of this document, adding Arabic, Chinese and Russian as working languages of the Convention would have significant cost implications for Parties amounting to an additional USD 4.6 million over each triennium. However, due to the number of Parties (and individuals) speaking those languages and in the spirit of multilingualism enshrined in United Nations [General Assembly resolution 71/328](#), the implementation of the Convention would be facilitated, and perhaps more effective, if more documents were available in Arabic, Chinese and Russian.
14. If financial constraints precluded the inclusion of Arabic, Chinese and Russian as working languages of the Convention, the Secretariat believes that nevertheless a tiered incremental approach focusing on key documents that are essential to the work of national authorities could respond to the sentiments expressed in document CoP18 Doc. 8 and improve the implementation of the Convention in the 24 Parties mentioned in paragraph 13 of the present document:

Document (in order of priority)	Arabic	Chinese	Russian
Convention text	Missing	Done	Done
Current Resolutions	Missing	Done – to be uploaded on the CITES website after it has been shared by China	Partly done for a workshop – to be revised, completed and uploaded on the CITES website
Current Decisions	Missing	Done – to be uploaded on the CITES website after it has been shared by China	Missing
Other key documents for identification, enforcement, etc.	To be identified with the help of Parties	To be identified with the help of Parties	To be identified with the help of Parties

The table above only contains those documents that the Secretariat is aware are available in Arabic, Chinese and Russian. Parties that have translated CITES documents in those and other languages are also invited to make themselves known to the Secretariat, noting that the Secretariat would upload those documents as received without reviewing the accuracy of the translation.

15. The first step of a possible tiered incremental approach would be to identify those documents that have already been translated in Arabic, Chinese and Russian and to publish them on the CITES website as received. The second step would be to identify key documents, namely the Convention and current Resolutions, and have them translated in any language where they are missing. Due to the high number of Resolutions to be translated (99 valid Resolutions in 2021), it may be prudent to start with the following Resolutions that are essential to the work of Management and Scientific Authorities and to understanding how CITES operates such as:
 - Resolution Conf. 8.4 (Rev. CoP15) on *National laws for implementation of the Convention*
 - Resolution 10.3 on *Designation and role of the Scientific Authorities*
 - Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP18) on *Compliance and enforcement*
 - Resolution Conf. 11.17 (Rev. CoP18) on *National reports*
 - Resolution Conf. 12.3 (Rev. CoP18) on *Permits and certificates*
 - Resolution Conf. 12.8 (Rev. CoP18) on *Review of Significant Trade in specimens of Appendix-II species*
 - Resolution Conf. 14.3 (Rev. CoP18) on *CITES compliance procedures*
 - Resolution Conf. 16.7 (Rev. CoP17) on *Non-detriment findings*,
 - Resolution Conf. 17.8 on *Disposal of illegally traded and confiscated specimens of CITES-listed species*
 - Resolution Conf. 18.2 on *Establishment of committees*
 - Resolution Conf. 18.3 on *CITES Strategic Vision: 2021-2030*
 - Resolution Conf. 18.6 on *Designation and role of Management Authorities*
 - Resolution Conf. 18.7 on *Legal acquisition findings*
16. The list above is just a starting point. If a specific resolution is of particular importance for a specific constituency, then that document would be included in the priority list. For example, if several Parties that have Russian as an official language wish to register captive-breeding operations, then Resolution Conf. 12.10 (Rev. CoP15) on *Registration of operations that breed Appendix-I animal species in captivity for commercial purposes* should be translated into Russian as a priority. Similarly, if several Parties that have Arabic as an official language are part of the Review of Significant Trade process, then Resolution Conf. 12.8 (Rev. CoP18) on *Review of Significant Trade in specimens of Appendix-II species* should be translated into Arabic as a priority.
17. As a third step, other documents, such as identification or enforcement documents could be translated in relevant target languages. For instance, the *CITES cheetah trade resource kit*, due to the interest of Arabic-speaking countries in the issue, could be translated into Arabic. Another example is the *Guidelines for inspection of captive-breeding and ranching facilities* and the *Guide to the application of CITES source codes* that has already been translated into Chinese. Depending on the subject matter and at the request of Parties, some other documents could be translated in Arabic, Chinese or Russian.

18. The total cost of such an incremental approach is costed below, for a total of USD 161,000 as a one-time exercise to carry out the work described above:

Incremental language strategy:	Estimated cost (in USD)
Development of the CITES website in three additional languages	15,000
Translation cost of Resolutions and Decisions and of the CITES website in three additional languages	146,000
Total	161,000

The translation of new resolutions and of revisions to valid resolutions can be estimated at a cost of USD 20,000 every three years.

A possible third option

19. As part of its work on the revision of this document, the Secretariat devised a third possible way at a lower cost, while ensuring the availability of all essential documents in Arabic, Chinese and Russian. This third option is to have only the meetings of the Conference of the Parties in all six UN official languages. This would entail having all the working documents, amendment proposals and in-session documents translated in all six languages and having interpretation in all six languages during the meeting. After the meeting of the Conference of the Parties, three translators/revisers (one per language) would need to be hired for one month in order to compile in each language the new and revised Resolutions and Decisions and to verify the quality of the translation. This task is currently done by the Secretariat staff in English, French and Spanish. Intersessionally, the work of the Standing, Animals and Plants Committees and of the Secretariat (Notifications, etc.) would continue in English, French and Spanish only. The cost of this third option can be estimated as follows:

Third option:	Estimated cost (in USD)
Translation of CoP documents in Arabic, Chinese and Russian	350,000
Cost for 12 translators during CoP meeting	92,700
Interpretation in Arabic, Chinese and Russian during the CoP meeting	205,900
Hiring of 3 revisers (one per language) to compile and revise the revised and new Resolutions and Decisions (salary of 3 P-4 revisers for a month)	53,067
Total	701,667

20. The Secretariat notes that, should this be the preferred option, it would be helpful to implement the incremental strategy (option 2) as a first step during the first two years of the triennium, so the corpus of valid Decisions and Resolutions can be available in all six UN languages. These Resolutions (and Decisions) will in turn be amended or revised at the following CoP meeting in the third year of the triennium.

Conclusions

21. The Finance and Budget Subcommittee could consider the following three options for a language strategy, noting that options 2 and 3 are complementary:
- Option 1: the complete integration of Arabic, Chinese and Russian as languages of the Convention at an estimated cost of USD 4.6 million to the Secretariat for the triennium, i.e. an increase of the operational budget under the General Trust Fund (CTL) by 24.63% for the triennium; or
 - Option 2: an incremental language strategy that aims to identify, with the help of interested Parties, those documents that should be translated as a priority in order to facilitate the daily implementation work of their national authorities at an estimated cost of USD 161,000, i.e. an increase by 0.86% for the triennium of the operational budget under the General Trust Fund (CTL) or from external funding; or
 - Option 3: a third option with language services in all six UN official languages provided only for the meetings of the Conference of the Parties at an estimated cost of USD 701,667 for the triennium, i.e. an increase of the operational budget under the General Trust Fund by 3.75% for the triennium.

22. At its next meeting scheduled for late January or early February 2022, the Finance and Budget and Subcommittee is invited to:
- a) make a recommendation to the Standing Committee based on the three options laid out in paragraph 21 above; or
 - b) propose an alternative language strategy to the Standing Committee.

Recommendations of the Finance and Budget Subcommittee

23. The Finance and Budget Subcommittee will meet on the first day of the 74th meeting of the Standing Committee to consider this issue and will report to the Committee later during the week.

Recommendations by the Secretariat

24. Taking into account the recommendations of the Finance and Budget Subcommittee, the Standing Committee is invited to formulate a way forward for the implementation of Decision 18.30 on *Language strategy for the Convention*.