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MEETING TO CONCLUDE AND ENDORSE THE PROPOSED CENTRAL ASIAN FLYWAY ACTION PLAN TO CONSERVE MIGRATORY WATERBIRDS AND THEIR HABITATS

New Delhi, 10-13 June 2005

CMS/CAF/Report
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NEW DELHI STATEMENT

ON THE

MEETING TO CONCLUDE AND ENDORSE THE PROPOSED CENTRAL ASIAN FLYWAY ACTION PLAN TO CONSERVE MIGRATORY WATERBIRDS AND THEIR HABITATS

New Delhi, 10-12 June 2005

1. The Meeting to Conclude and Endorse the Proposed Central Asian Flyway Action Plan to Conserve Migratory Waterbirds and their Habitats, held in New Delhi, India, from 10-12 June 2005, was attended by nearly 100 participants from the following Range States of the Central Asian Flyway (CAF): Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan and Yemen, and representatives of the United States of America, African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA), Central Asian Regional Environment Centre (Kazakhstan), BirdLife International, International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC), International Crane Foundation, Wetlands International, and a number of national non-governmental organisations and institutions, including Bombay Natural History Society, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, and Wildlife Protection Society of India's Indian Cranes and Wetlands Working Group. Range States from the CAF region not in attendance were Bahrain, Georgia, Kuwait, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

2. The Meeting was organised by the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), in cooperation with Wetlands International. Wetlands International also provided technical advice to the CMS Secretariat and in-kind support to the meeting.

3. The Meeting expressed its sincere gratitude to the Indian Ministry of Environment and Forests for hosting the event with organisational support from the Wildlife Institute of India.

4. It also expressed its thanks for the generous financial contributions provided by the Governments of India, the Netherlands and Switzerland, as well as CMS, AEWA, the Global Environment Facility, and the UNEP Regional Offices for West Asia, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe (Pan-European Biodiversity and Landscape Strategy).

5. The Meeting was officially inaugurated by Honourable Minister for Environment and Forests, Government of India, Thiru A. Raja, in the presence of Mr. Namo Narain Meena, Minister of State for Environment and Forests, Dr. Prodipto Ghosh, Secretary of the same Ministry, Mr Douglas Hykle, Senior Advisor, Convention on Migratory Species, Mrs. Désirée Bonis, Deputy Head of Mission, Royal Netherlands Embassy and Mr. Ward Hagemeijer, Head of Biodiversity and Ecological Networks, Wetlands International.

6. Mr. R.P.S Katwal, Additional Director General, Wildlife, the Indian Ministry of Environment and Forests, was elected to chair the Meeting.

7. The CAF covers a large continental area of Eurasia between the Arctic and Indian Oceans and associated island chains. The Flyway comprises several important waterbird migration routes, most of which extend from the northernmost breeding grounds in Russia (Siberia) to the southernmost non-breeding (wintering) grounds in West and South Asia, the Maldives and the British Indian Ocean Territory.

8. The CAF covers at least 182 migratory waterbird species, including 29 globally threatened and near-threatened species that breed, migrate and spend the non-breeding (winter) period within the region. These waterbirds use a wide variety of habitats during their annual cycle. This continental flyway comprises large semi-arid habitats with a limited number of wetlands, particularly in the staging areas. Different groups of migratory waterbirds appear to overlap considerably in the usage of important sites. Many of the wetlands are situated in areas with dense human populations where they provide many goods and services to the people, but where they are increasingly being unsustainably exploited by humans. Thus the management of these wetlands to secure the provision of these goods and services requires coordinated multi-sectoral planning and implementation to realise the needs of local people and biodiversity conservation.

9. Many countries along the CAF have developing or transitional economies with inadequate allocation of resources for conservation and for involvement of local stakeholders in sustainable management of wetlands. In addition, changes in political systems and instability in some countries, language and other barriers may not have enabled strong cooperation among some flyway countries.

10. The wetlands and other habitats on which the waterbirds depend are consequently very threatened along the CAF, and therefore in need of internationally agreed and co-ordinated and science-based conservation measures, ensuring sustainable benefits to people as well as survival of species and habitats.

11. The New Delhi Meeting was the second meeting of the CAF Range States since they first met in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in 2001, to discuss a draft action plan for the CAF to conserve migratory waterbirds and their habitats.

12. The New Delhi Meeting had four primary meeting objectives: (1) to provide Range State delegations with an overview of flyway conservation issues; (2) to finalise and endorse the draft CAF Action Plan; (3) to consider, prioritise and endorse selected implementation activities, and lay the basis for exploring and possibly establishing an interim coordination mechanism; and (4) to develop a consensus on their preferred option for a legal and institutional framework for the CAF region.

13. (1) A series of technical presentations provided an overview of flyways and global and regional frameworks for migratory waterbird and habitat conservation, a review of migration strategies of waterbirds

in the CAF, the International Waterbird Census programme, the Important Bird Area programme, a case study of national habitat inventory for migratory waterbirds in India and the CMS MOU on Siberian Crane and related UNEP GEF Project.

14. (2) The draft CAF Action Plan text was carefully discussed and amended by the Meeting. A number of new action points were introduced. One piece of outstanding information is awaited from the Russian Federation regarding populations of waterbirds to be included in Table 2, and it was confirmed that this information would be provided to the CMS Secretariat within 2 months of the Meeting's closure. It was agreed that the Action Plan would be circulated by the CMS Secretariat to the Range States for final review and comment prior to its adoption at a future intergovernmental meeting.

15. (3) A list of seven priority international project concepts to support and inform implementation of the CAF Action Plan was reviewed by the Meeting. The Meeting strongly supported the need to implement projects to (a) prepare a directory of sites of international importance for migratory waterbirds in the CAF; (b) develop a monitoring strategy and strengthen capacity for monitoring waterbirds in the CAF, (c) prepare a flyway status overview of national and international conservation aspects of migratory waterbirds and their habitats as a basis for cooperative conservation action, (d) prepare a flyway overview of the status and trends of waterbird populations to determine future monitoring and conservation priorities, and (e) establish a flyway network of key contacts and collate an international register of waterbird and habitat projects. There was also agreement on the need to develop a medium-term Flyway Strategic Plan to support implementation of the Action Plan. Three additional priorities were proposed by the Meeting, including the development of single species action plans for threatened species, an awareness programme and common framework for inventory of wetlands. The CMS and AEWA Secretariats were invited to consider the priorities of the Meeting in initiating development of flyway activities to support implementation of the Action Plan. The CMS Secretariat was also invited to further explore with Range States, AEWA and other potential partners, the concept of an interim coordination mechanism to initially support the implementation of the Action Plan, once adopted.

16. (4) The Range States present were invited to provide an indication of their Government's or Ministry's preference to link the Action Plan under discussion either to a legally-binding or non-binding instrument. Of the 23 delegations present, twelve were in a position to express an official view – in most instances reflecting the position of their Ministry, rather than a Government position. It was recognized that the opinions expressed were to be considered preliminary and non-binding, and that they might change after further inter-ministerial consultations. Most of the countries represented had not initiated such consultations with other relevant Ministries prior to the meeting.

17. Delegations expressing an official view were nearly unanimous in their preference for a legally-binding instrument and, of these, there was near unanimity for the Action Plan to be integrated with the existing African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA). An informal poll of the remaining delegations also suggested a general tendency in favour of a legally-binding instrument, with the Action Plan linked to the AEWA. Three delegations expressed, officially or unofficially, a preference for the Action Plan to be linked to a non-binding memorandum of understanding.

18. While the conclusions of the Meeting provide clear guidance for exploring the AEWA-linked option in more depth, it was noted that an official view was still awaited from 18 of the Range States concerned, and most of the others had still to confirm their position on a Government level. The legal, technical and other ramifications of the approach garnering the most support warrant further investigation in the coming months by both the CMS and AEWA Secretariats, as well as detailed consideration by their respective governing bodies when they meet towards the end of 2005.

19. The Meeting participants reiterated their heartfelt thanks to the Indian Government for the excellent arrangements for the Meeting, which were conducive to a congenial and efficient work environment.