

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Secretariat

Organization Background:

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an international agreement between governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.

The CITES Secretariat is administered by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), which plays a coordinating, advisory, and servicing role in the working of the Convention.



States that have signed on to CITES are known as Parties. Although CITES is legally binding on the Parties – in other words they have to implement the Convention – it does not take the place of national laws. Instead it provides a framework to be respected by each Party, which has to adopt its own domestic legislation to ensure that CITES is implemented at the national level.

International wildlife trade is estimated to be worth billions of dollars annually and includes hundreds of millions of plant and animal specimens. Levels of exploitation of some animal and plant species are high and the trade in them, together with other factors, such as habitat loss, can heavily deplete their populations and even bring some species close to extinction. Many wildlife species listed in CITES are not endangered, but the existence of an agreement to ensure the sustainability of the trade is important in order to safeguard these resources for the future.

Because the trade in wild animals and plants crosses borders between countries, the effort to regulate it requires international cooperation to safeguard certain species from over-exploitation. CITES was conceived in the spirit of such cooperation. Today, it accords varying degrees of protection to more than 35,000 species of animals and plants, whether they are traded as live specimens, fur coats, or dried herbs.

CITES works by subjecting international trade in specimens of selected species to certain controls. All import and export of the species covered by the Convention has to be authorized through a licensing system. Each Party to the Convention must designate one or more Management Authorities in charge of administering that licensing system and one or more Scientific Authorities to advise them on the effects of trade on the status of the species.

The species covered by CITES are listed in three groups, according to the degree of protection needed:

- Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction. Trade in specimens of these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances.
- Appendix II includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled in order to maintain populations.
- Appendix III contains species that are protected in at least one country and that country has asked other CITES Parties for assistance in controlling the trade.

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Opening Position:

- You want to help stakeholders find consensus and practical solutions.
- As an organ of the United Nations, you should act as an impartial arbiter.
- You will advocate for vigorous enforcement, verification, and monitoring of illegal wildlife trade.
- You can provide useful information and data to all parties on wildlife conservation, sustainability, and the consequences of wildlife trafficking.



Questions to Consider:

- What progress has CITES made on improving the situation facing the illegal wildlife industry and maintaining sustainable wildlife trade?
- What measures are in place to prevent further damage to endangered species? How effective are these measures?
- How important are the challenges facing wildlife to the UN?
- What do UN member states believe is the best way to handle the situation?
- How can CITES better assist other nations with information sharing and regulation of wildlife trafficking?
- Since the ban on trading pangolins has not been effective, what other ideas are there to save them from possible extinction?
- What are the practices of local communities in Bengkano, Keneselles, and Trangalia that may provide shared interests where pangolins are concerned? What are some practices of these communities that may be a source of conflict when discussing protection for pangolins?