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

69th Meeting of the Standing Committee

27th November – 1st December 2017, Geneva

Agenda Item 24. Arrangements for the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Scheduled for 27th November 2017 (Monday) between 10:00 and 12:30 (final item in this slot).

Congratulations on your appointment Madam Chair,

Dear Standing Committee Members, Party Delegates, Observers, and the CITES Secretariat.

The Government of Sri Lanka, on behalf of the Department of Wildlife Conservation, our CITES Management Authority, is grateful for this opportunity to address the 69th Meeting of the Standing Committee.

Sri Lanka is of course fully committed to CITES, as we consider sustainable trade that takes into account the conservation of wild fauna and flora, to be essential for a healthy and prosperous economy. Our commitment to this Convention has been emphasised by multiple actions over the past few years. These include for instance the seizure of illegally traded blood ivory, which was publicly destroyed in an event attended by the Secretary – General, which embraced our multi-faith society, by way of including Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, and Muslim leaders performing funeral rites for the slain animals. Being an island nation that relies significantly on our marine resources, we were also pleased that the thresher shark proposal we submitted was successfully adopted, and that many other commercially valuable marine species are forming a core component of CITES.

However, we are aware that even more challenges still need to be overcome. It was with this in mind that we took the initiative to host the 18th Conference of the Parties, which was endorsed by all Parties at CoP17. As you might imagine, we look forward to this opportunity to further our commitment toward sustainable trade and the conservation of nature, upon which so many livelihoods rely on.

In order to make this CoP a success, under the leadership of His Excellency, the President of Sri Lanka, a national CITES CoP18 planning steering committee has been established. This committee is working across multiple sectors in Sri Lanka, and of course in partnership with the CITES Secretariat. We would like to take this opportunity to commend the dedication and commitment of the Secretariat in assisting us with preparations, and look forward to working closely with them over the coming months.

We would also like to extend a special thanks to our colleagues from South Africa, who have very kindly taken the time to share their experiences of hosting CoP17 last year, which has no doubt set a very high standard to follow!

Back at home, preparations are also currently underway to prepare for an official launch of the CoP18 website, which would take place along with the signing of the Host Country Agreement in the first quarter of 2018. This website will contain all the information you require to prepare for your travels to our island in the Indian Ocean.

We have identified the venue to be the Bandaranaike Memorial International Convention Hall, or BMICH, in Colombo our capital city. This is a short distance from our international airport and has a wide range of hotels within 20 minutes of the venue. Colombo is of course also a perfect starting point for our diverse wildlife, cultural, and tropical beach destinations for your holidays once the CoP ends!

Finally, we are extremely pleased to announce to you today that the dates are now confirmed. CITES CoP18, commencing with the 71st Standing Committee, will take place on the **22nd of May 2019**. The formal opening ceremony will

be on the **23rd of May**, with the rest of the meeting running until the **3rd of June, 2019**. These dates were chosen as they follow Vesak, our Festival of Lights to celebrate the birth, enlightenment, and death of Buddha, and ending just before Id Ul-Fitr, celebrated by our Muslim communities.

We can therefore officially begin the countdown clock! And as we progress with our planning, we are very aware that the outcomes of the CoP are only possible with the dedication and efforts of each of you in this room. We therefore wish all of you the very best in preparing over the coming 18 months, and look forward to welcoming every one of you to our multicultural, and environmentally diverse country in 2019.

Thank you very much.