

Memo from the Elections Officer to the IUCN Council

Barcelona 14th October 2008

Having been designated by Council to act as Election Officer in two World Conservation Congresses (Bangkok and Barcelona), I would like to share with you some thoughts and suggest a few ideas in order to improve performance at future venues.

I have noticed that IUCN members (and even some Councilors) do not have a clear idea of the role of the Election Officer during the Congress. This role should be explained well in advance and at the beginning of each Congress in order to prevent misunderstandings and negative interferences.

According to article 74 of the Rules of Procedures of the World Conservation Congress, the Election Officer is responsible for supervising the elections at the World Congress and the counting of votes. This means that any act organized within the Congress related to election will be supervised by him or her, whether it has been organized by the Secretariat, by the members or by the candidates themselves.

It would also be helpful to remind members that the Election Officer was appointed by Council as an independent person and has no relation with the Secretariat (besides receiving logistic support from it). He is not a staff member, something also to be explained to staff.

In the case that the nationality of the Election Officer appointed happens to be the same of any of the presidential candidates (nominated later) it would be convenient that Council re-considers his or her appointment and eventually search for another person with a different nationality in order to mitigate any sort of speculations based on deep tribalism.

If political interests in the presidential elections continue to increase –hopefully not!- Council should face this source of noise disturbing the election process and decide either on preventing or reducing it, or to organizing a system to cope with it in a proper and functional manner.

If external observers are to be allowed, the full procedures for elections (including the revising of credentials and distribution of ballots) must be thoroughly revised. Otherwise, the role of observers would be non-sense and disrupt the process (i.e. Barcelona) making it probably not operational.

I also recommend that the terms of reference for the Election Officer include a paragraph specifying to whom and for what issue the Election Officer has to report; for instance, to the Council and to the Congress Steering Committee.

Another useful addition should be, if so approved, that the Election Officer will procure that the elections results are not know in advance by anybody but she or he.

In the case that the Election Officer detects activities regarding elections or voting that contradict the Statutory provisions, the principles of equity and fair play, or any ruling approved or endorsed by Council, is he or she supposed to take action or just report to the Congress Steering Committee?. The extent of the Election Officer's authority should be clearly expressed in the term of references and not leave it open to interpretation.

If Council maintains its decision of not allowing non standardized propaganda of the candidates during the Congress, that decision should be announced not only to the candidates, but to all members. During the last Congress it took much time to patrol and remove pamphlets placed in the exhibit room or entrance hall by very enthusiastic supporters of some candidates, which excused themselves in not knowing that rule.

The main source of errors in the election process, so far as I have been able to spot, is the credentials desk procedure to distribute ballot packs. I recommend that Council organizes a specific task force to analyze the process in detail and reorganize it in a more secure way (for example, electronic and manual registers should bear the same number in order to match).

- A specific method for controlling the ballot packs given to Category A members is urgently needed. Most common error is that a ballot pack is given to a government agency of that state in addition of the three packs given to the state member delegate.
- A procedure to guarantee that governmental agency members can exercise their voting right should also be studied, as many state members do not follow the Statutes provision to hand over one ballot pack to the governmental agencies, or it is done in an improper manner (no consultation, etc.) Although it is their responsibility, improper behaviour in this respect is influencing the smooth running of voting. Any procedure that helps solving this source of error would be of utmost importance!!

The electronic voting system needs some technical improvements, particularly:

- A quicker way to update the system before each sitting (member lists, etc.)
- Handling proxy votes (not enough time to process many proxies one by one in the case that there are many motions fed in the system).

- Find a transparent system to check that members' voting rights + buttons are working properly. This is crucial and would save a lot of time and give confidence to members.

I suggest that the blue and yellow buttons are used for this purpose. Hopefully, they can be programmed so that any member with a voting card can press the blue button and a light blinks for a few seconds to acknowledge that the system is recognizing one vote right and it works. The yellow button would be used to check if the member has a second voting right and is working properly. This test should be made available throughout the whole General Assembly.

Needless to say that it has been once more an honor to serve as Election Officer, although this time in Barcelona the process was a bit bumpy.

With warm regards and all best wishes for success

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Machado', written over a horizontal line.

Prof. Dr Antonio Machado
Elections Officer