

ATCM XXXVI PRESS COMMUNIQUE

From 20 to 29 May 2013, Belgium hosted the XXXVI meeting of the Consultative Parties to the Antarctic Treaty and the XVI meeting on Environmental Protection (CEP). The meetings were jointly organized by the Federal Departments of Foreign Affairs, Environment and Science Policy. The Parties welcomed the Czech Republic as the 29th Consultative Party.

Since 1959, the Antarctic Treaty has been the centrepiece of international cooperation to preserve the unique character of Antarctica as a natural reserve devoted to peace and science through exchange of information, consultation and formulation of Measures, Decisions and Resolutions.

More than 450 delegates representing the 50 Parties, including officials, renowned scientists, experts and international observers attended this yearly meeting with a common goal: to promote effective international cooperation on challenges and emerging threats facing Antarctica.

Science has remained at the center of the discussions. The parties highlighted the strategic role of science in policy making on the study of the effects of climate change and other threats to the environment

International cooperation is at the core of the Treaty and was again the key phrase in official statements and in discussions among delegates.

One of the key achievements of this year's ATCM was the adoption of a strategic work plan which identifies priorities to be pursued under 3 key areas in order to reinforce cooperation in ensuring a robust and effective Antarctic Treaty System, in strengthening the protection of the Antarctic environment and in the effective management and regulation of human activities in Antarctica.

In order to address potential environmental damage, the CEP identified a series of critical policy issues and endorsed a site clean-up manual. Following the report of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) on Climate change and impacts on the environment, the CEP decided to develop a prioritized climate change response work plan. The ATCM adopted, on the CEP's advice, 17 managements plans for Antarctic protected areas and 16 Site Guidelines for visitors.

Parties supported further international cooperation on Antarctic science and logistics. The Meeting held a full day special session on Search and Rescue in Antarctica and Parties decided to continue to collaborate actively, to share best practices, to cooperate with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and to encourage the five Rescue Coordination Centers in the Antarctic region to conduct exercises with each other and other relevant entities.

Tourism remains a point of attention. In response, Parties adopted a Decision on exchange of information and decided to focus in particular on land based and adventure tourism at the next meeting.

The participants expressed their appreciation for the hospitality provided by Belgium, one of the twelve founding Parties of the Antarctic Treaty and congratulated the Belgian government for an excellent organization and a smooth conduct of the meetings. Brazil will host the next ATCM in Brasilia, tentatively from 12 to 21 May 2014.