Rapid Movement of Musical Instruments
SC81

1. Background and Summary

Musicians perform with valuable and culturally significant musical instruments legally crafted decades and even centuries ago. A number of these instruments contain small amounts of ivory, shell, reptile skin, tree species, or other materials regulated under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES).

In partnership with CITES, music stakeholders support awareness and compliance with current permit requirements while pursuing policy improvements that will alleviate unnecessary burdens. **The most effective way to minimize the burden of the permit process is to appropriately exempt noncommercial movement of musical instruments from permit requirements during the listing and annotations process for future listings, and to provide simplified procedures under current listings for activities that do not threaten the conservation of protected species.** Musical instruments traveling for performance remain in the ownership of the musician or ensemble and return to their point of origin; the music sector shares the Parties' commitment to conservation and supports enforcement against illegal trade in protected species.

We offer the following context as the Parties consider action related to Doc. 50 Rapid Movement of Wildlife Diagnostic Samples and Efficient Movement of Musical Instruments, Doc. 47 Purpose-of-Transaction Codes, and Doc. 48 Electronic Systems and Information Technology.

2. Musical Instrument Certificate and Traveling Exhibition Certificate - Consolidated Permits

The CITES Musical Instrument Certificate (MIC) is not an exemption from the permit process. It is a consolidated permit. The MIC streamlines the requirement for obtaining multiple CITES re-export permits when an instrument contains CITES material and is not exempted from permit requirements by an annotation. Musicians using the MIC apply to their CITES Management Authority for issuance of a single permit, which must then be credentialed by CITES enforcement officials at each designated port through which an instrument travels.

Musical instruments accompanied by a CITES Musical Instrument Certificate may be hand-carried, in checked luggage, or transported via cargo for larger items. The purpose code P is indicated on a certificate for personal use by individuals. The MIC is typically used by individual musicians, while a CITES Traveling Exhibition Certificate (TEC) can also be used by ensembles traveling with multiple instruments. The purpose code Q is indicated on a TEC when a larger ensemble may be considered a traveling exhibition of multiple instruments on a single permit.

3. Personal Effects Exemption

The personal effects exemption ***does not*** provide full solutions for traveling musicians. The extensive challenges in applying the personal effects exemption and in using the MIC were detailed in CoP19 Inf. 18 (Rev. 1), *Consideration of Additional Efficiencies in the Movement of Musical Instruments for Non-Commercial Purposes*. In this information document, the United States authorities noted that inefficiencies in the MIC as well as the personal effects exemption have led to clearance delays, seizures, and canceled performances. The personal effects exemption is only available for Appendix II-listed species, is unevenly accepted across CITES Parties, and is not available for large ensembles shipping instruments by cargo.

4. Improving the Rapid Movement of Musical Instruments

For species for which CITES permits are required, individual musicians and ensembles report that the required time and financial expense of obtaining and putting to use the MIC and TEC has

often left no option but to forgo travel with their best musical instruments or use instruments that compromise the quality of performances. The costs associated with obtaining the documentation needed to support a permit application, required fees, and extra travel expense for reaching a CITES-designated port are a barrier for musicians, and the process of issuing and credentialing these permits is extremely variable from country to country. Limited ports are available for credentialing permits and enforcement officers are available at limited hours, which can prevent musicians from traveling efficiently and affordably. **The process is in urgent need of harmonization in order to fully facilitate noncommercial travel with musical instruments.**

An increasing number of CITES parties, including the European Union, require a traveling exhibition certificate (TEC) issued by the first country in which a performance takes place in addition to a TEC issued by the country of departure. This means that ensembles, management authorities, and enforcement officials alike must forgo the efficiency of a single permit for a group of instruments and instead seek multiple documents for travel.

At its 20th meeting (CoP20; Samarkand, 2025), the Conference of the Parties adopted Decisions 20.136 to 20.139. Musical Instrument stakeholders have participated in the working group on Rapid Movement of Wildlife Diagnostic Samples and of Musical Instruments and submitted a comprehensive response to Notification to the Parties No. 2026/071 on the challenges and solutions for simplified procedures for the efficient non-commercial movement of musical instruments for purposes of performance, display or competition. This includes the recommendation to extend the Musical Instrument Certificate's validity period from three years to ten years in duration. The music stakeholder community stands ready to partner on the recommendations of the working group, as outlined in SC81 Doc. 50.

5. Electronic Systems and Information Technology

Electronic permitting would help to streamline and make more efficient the process of acquiring, using, and invalidating musical instrument permits. An electronic system would help expedite the permit issuance and the invalidation processes, while reducing the burden on enforcement authorities. Currently, musicians holding individual permits must void them before their instruments are included on a group permit. Given the narrow timeframe between engagements, this is impractical. Additionally, for individual musicians who retain ownership of their instruments over time, the permit burden would be lessened by streamlining the permit renewal process. Electronic systems also hold potential for relieving the burden posed by the requirement to physically credential permits at each border crossing, would enhance transparency, and could allow real-time data exchange between management and enforcement authorities. Music stakeholders are participating in the CITES Electronic Systems and Information Technology Working Group and submitted comprehensive comments in response to the Secretariat's September 2026 request for input related to the CITES Hub Model for Permit Data Exchange Project.

This document is endorsed by:

American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada

American Federation of Violin and Bow Makers

Association of British Orchestras

Australian Music Association

C.F. Martin & Co.

Chambre Syndicale de la Facture Instrumentale (CSFI)

European Soundmakers
International Federation of Musicians
International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative Deutschland e.V. (I.P.C.I)
International Alliance of Violin and Bow Makers for Endangered Species
International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative-USA
International Society of Musicians
International Society of Violin and Bow Makers
IPCI France Europe
League of American Orchestras
Music Industries Association (MIA)
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National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM)
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