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The role of CITES Rescue Centers in orchid conservation: Concerns and questions raised by the collaboration on an endangered slipper orchid (*Paphiopedilum vietnamense* O. Gruss & Perner)

The Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) is an international treaty currently adopted by 169 member countries to regulate international trade in over 30,000 species of animal and plants. Plants that are not transported in accordance with CITES requirements may be either denied entry, and sometimes abandoned, or subject to seizure by enforcement officials in importing countries. Instead of being destroyed, abandoned or confiscated plants may be returned to the range countries or sent to CITES Rescue Centers, which are public museums or botanical gardens in member countries where the plants are cared for and cultivated. In many cases, the plants placed in rescue centers are unusual or extremely rare species, and may consist of multiple plants exhibiting natural population variability. Increasingly, as habitats are disturbed or destroyed, it has become the role of botanic gardens and arboreta, particularly CITES rescue centers, to do more than provide care for these species. Rescue centers should give consideration to the value of the genetic material entrusted to them, which may be valuable for establishing *ex situ* populations that might serve as a source of plants to repopulate degraded habitats. This can involve resources unavailable to public gardens and could provide an opportunity for collaboration with commercial growers and private citizens. An example of this type of collaboration is the successful and legal propagation and distribution of *Paphiopedilum vietnamense* from nine plants that arrived 5 years ago at U.S. Botanic Garden. The intent of this collaboration was to offer legal plants in quantities that would serve to reduce collecting pressure on wild populations. However, certain legal and ethical concerns are generated when such partnerships are undertaken. Activities involving CITES Appendix-I plants needs to be approached with the utmost consideration of the implications for the species' conservation. The successes and concerns raised by this collaborative effort can serve as a guide for creating a protocol for conservation and propagation programs for any endangered orchid species that might be received by rescue centers in the future.