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Parties to Aarhus Convention agree new target areas to promote the Convention's principles internationally



At the fifteenth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention), held at the United Nations in Geneva from 3 to 5 September 2012, Parties reaffirmed their binding commitment to promote the principles of the Convention in international forums and identified key areas, including new processes, for targeted action.

A thematic session on promoting the Convention's principles created a new momentum for furthering this strategic area of work led by France. The session, attended by more than 100 delegates from Governments, non-governmental and international organizations, international financial institutions (IFIs), academia, business and industry, focused on three key issues: efforts by the Parties to promote public participation before, during and after the Rio Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference) in June 2012; measures taken by Parties at the national level to systematically promote public participation in all international forums dealing with environmental matters; and public participation in projects funded by IFIs.

At the session, civil society urged Parties to contact their representatives of the boards of IFIs to make them aware of their obligation to promote the Aarhus Convention's principles in IFI processes. They stressed that major improvements were needed in the release of information on environmental conditions included in IFI projects and contracts, and more regular disclosure of environmental information, for example monitoring reports. They also stressed that compliance mechanisms should provide responses in a more timely manner. The importance of supporting and strengthening such mechanisms was highlighted by several delegates.

Parties to the Aarhus Convention committed to take concrete actions to actively promote the principles of the Convention in the initiatives to be put in place as a result of the Rio+20 Conference, in particular in the new high-level forum on sustainable development and in the upgrading of the United Nations Environment Programme. They also committed to identify concrete actions that they might take, individually or collectively with other Governments, to promote the principles of the Aarhus Convention in the processes, policies and projects of IFIs taking part in the session, namely the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Investment Bank. Parties were invited to each develop and implement a national action plan to systematically promote the principles of the Convention in all international forums dealing with matters relating to the environment, including those under the competencies of other ministries.

The Working Group meeting this week also featured a web link-up with the Government of Chile and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, which presented 10 Latin American countries' initiative to establish a legal instrument on Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration for the Latin American region. The meeting also heard a presentation by the Green Access Project of Japan, which seeks to identify appropriate models of public participation for protecting the environment and creating a sustainable society in Japan.

For further information, please visit www.unece.org/env/pp/welcome.html

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Note to editors

The Aarhus Convention was adopted in Aarhus, Denmark, in June 1998 and signed by the European Community (now European Union) and 39 countries from all subregions of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE). It entered into force in October 2001. The Convention enshrines Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, which concerns the rights of the public to have access to information, public participation and access to review procedures regarding the environment. The Aarhus Convention's amendment on public participation in decisions on the deliberate release into the environment and placing on the market of genetically modified organisms was adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its second session, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan on 25-27 May 2005. The Parties to the Convention are: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the European Union. The Parties to the amendment on genetically modified organisms are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the European Union. The Parties to the Convention now include vast majority of countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, all countries in Caucasus and South Eastern Europe, and all EU member States.

Protocol to the Aarhus Convention on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTR)

The PRTR Protocol was adopted at an extraordinary meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention on 21 May 2003. Thirty-six member States and the European Community signed the Protocol in Kiev. The Protocol entered into force on 8 October 2009. The Parties to the PRTR Protocol are: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the European Union.

All agreements enter into force for a State on the ninetieth day after the date of deposit of the State's instrument of ratification, at which point it becomes a Party.

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