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in Decision-making and Access to Justice  
in Environmental Matters

**Fourth session**

Chisinau, 29 June–1 July 2011

### **Report of the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties**

#### **Addendum**

#### **Communication strategy**

**Endorsed by the Meeting of Parties to the Convention on Access to  
Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to  
Justice in Environmental Matters at its fourth session**

#### *Summary*

This document was prepared pursuant to the work programme for 2009–2011 adopted by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.17), and pursuant to the decisions of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, taken at its eleventh and thirteenth meetings (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2009/2, para 83; and ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2011/2, para. 27).

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## I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) was adopted in June 1998 in the Danish city of Aarhus.
2. The Convention links environmental rights and human rights, acknowledges that we owe an obligation to future generations, establishes that sustainable development can be achieved only through the involvement of all stakeholders, links Government accountability and environmental protection and focuses on interactions between the public and public authorities in a democratic context.
3. The Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers was adopted at an extraordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention in May 2003 in Kyiv, Ukraine. The Protocol is the first legally binding international instrument on pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs). Its objective is to enhance public access to information through the establishment of coherent, nationwide PRTRs. PRTRs are inventories of pollution from industrial sites and other sources. Although regulating information on pollution, rather than pollution directly, the Protocol is expected to exert a significant downward pressure on levels of pollution.
4. The communication strategy for the Convention and the PRTR Protocol is to be considered a “living” document and reviewed when required.
5. It should be noted that the trust funds of the Convention and of the Protocol have limited budgets for dedicated communication work. This strategy takes that into account and looks for channels of communication that require minimal resources. In addition, implementation of the strategy will be guided by the respective programmes of work.
6. A questionnaire surveying the needs of national focal points (NFPs), Aarhus Centres and non-governmental organizations, coordinated by the European ECO Forum, is included in annex I. The survey will help to evaluate whether current communication activities are perceived as relevant and successful or not, and in what areas there is a need for improvement. A list of available communication products is provided in annex II.

## II. Objectives

7. The aim of communication is to share information. In the context of a communication strategy, the aim is to provide specific information to specific audiences with the hope of that audience then taking a specific action to meet the overall objectives of the communication strategy. For the target audience to receive that information and to act upon it, the strategy must take into account what media are most likely to reach a specific audience and how the message needs to be phrased.
8. The overarching aim of this strategy is to provide national focal points, environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders with possible options for communication work.
9. The objectives of the strategy are informed by the objectives of the Strategic Plan 2009–2014, adopted by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention at its third session in Riga in June 2008 (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.16).
10. Many of the objectives in the Strategic Plan relate to communication to increase awareness, thereby contributing to implementation of key provisions of the Aarhus

Convention. The key objectives can be grouped into two main areas; rights and obligations. This is a simplification, but it is useful in determining the basic objectives of this communication strategy.

11. The first objective of this communication strategy is to communicate the rights afforded to people under the Convention and the Protocol. The main target audiences for this objective include NGOs (environmental, youth and industry-related), international forums and the public. Members of the public should be motivated through information that allows them to understand and demand their rights.

12. The second objective is to communicate the obligations of the Convention and the Protocol to the main target audiences, which include Governments, international forums and other stakeholders.

### III. Key messages

13. The following key messages have been identified for increasing interest in the Aarhus Convention and the PRTR Protocol.

#### **The Convention**

14. *Overarching message:* The Aarhus Convention recognizes every person's right to a healthy environment, as well as his or her duty to protect it.

15. *General Messages:* The Aarhus Convention:

(a) Is a new kind of environmental agreement, which links environmental rights and human rights;

(b) Is open for accession by any United Nations Member State, including those outside the UNECE region;

(c) Grants the public rights and imposes on Parties and public authorities obligations regarding enforcement of these rights on access to information, public participation and access to justice;

(d) Acknowledges that we owe an obligation to future generations;

(e) Establishes that sustainable development can be achieved only through the involvement of all stakeholders;

(f) Focuses on the nature and quality of the interactions between the public and public authorities in a democratic context;

(g) Is not only a traditional environmental agreement, it is also a Convention about Government accountability, transparency and responsiveness;

(h) Is also forging a new process for public participation in the negotiation and implementation of international agreements.

#### **The Protocol**

16. *Overarching message:* The Protocol on PRTRs promotes every person's right to a healthy community through easy, user-friendly and freely accessible information about pollution of the environment.

17. *General Messages:*

(a) PRTR, Health and Pollution: "What gets measured gets managed";

(b) First legally binding international instrument to enhance public access to information through the establishment of coherent, nationwide PRTRs, thereby facilitating public participation in environmental decision-making;

(c) Open for accession by any United Nations Member State, including those outside the UNECE region;

(d) Expects to exert a significant downward pressure on levels of pollution across different media (air, water, soil), through access to time series of releases and trends of environmental performance of industrial activities, as companies will not want to be identified as being among the biggest polluters;

(e) Contributes to the prevention and reduction of pollution of the environment, thereby promoting sustainable and environmentally sound development and corporate accountability;

(f) Grants public access to information contained in the PRTRs and ensures direct electronic access through public telecommunications networks including the Internet;

(g) Requires registers to progressively contain information on pollution from diffuse sources, such as road traffic, shipping, aviation, domestic combustion, agriculture, aquaculture and small polluting enterprises to land, water or air;

(h) Ensures public participation in the development and further review of pollutant release and transfer registers;

(i) Can help countries meet their obligations under other multilateral environmental agreements and international initiatives concerning sound management of chemicals, pollutants and waste while furthering their implementation;

(j) Ensures access to a review procedure if a request for access to information contained in the register is not fully satisfied.

#### **IV. Target audiences and information channels**

18. Given the limited resources, there is a need to prioritize and also to recognize that some target audiences for a communication strategy may also serve as information channels for wider communication to others. This strategy therefore aims to target specific audiences who can spread the knowledge of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol more widely. This requires not just tools and products for communicating directly to them, but also for them to use to communicate to others.

19. Governments are the first priority target audience, in terms of their obligations, together with the general public, in terms of its rights. Environmental NGOs also have an important role with regard to the Aarhus Convention in alerting the public to its rights and in supporting and helping Governments to understand and to act upon their obligations. In terms of shaping attitudes and behaviour, raising the awareness of children and youth could be an important medium-term target.

##### **A. Governments**

20. Government authorities at national, subnational and local levels (responsible for environment, water, agriculture, transport, industry, health, justice, education and foreign issues) are key to the successful implementation of the Convention and the Protocol.

21. Within Governments, focal points act as a “post box” to ensure the right information reaches the right people, and could even be encouraged to take a more proactive role in

promoting the Convention and the Protocol. They are the main channel of communication in countries (for both Parties and non-Parties to the Convention and to the Protocol). They are information multipliers and, via their promotional and communication activities, can reach and motivate important target groups and potential supporters — e.g., policymakers, national counterparts, donors, the media, other stakeholders and the general public — to get them interested and involved in implementation of the Convention and the Protocol.

22. Although they are very much involved in the work under the Convention, many focal points still require regular updates on activities and facilitation of their access to communication products. The focal points are also very busy with other obligations related to the implementation of the Convention and Protocol, but promotional and communication activities do not necessarily imply big events or investing extensive human and financial resources. There are many opportunities in the daily work at the technical or political levels to communicate the work and results of the Convention and the Protocol. It is important to relate the Convention and the Protocol to crucial political issues, in order to demonstrate their relevance and usefulness in addressing these issues and providing a basis for discussions at the national and international levels (e.g., on climate change and sustainable development).

23. To inform high-level policymakers of and elicit their interest in the Convention, the Protocol and their achievements, focal points can respond to questions and inquiries from national members of parliament regarding the Convention and the Protocol.

24. To promote the Convention and the Protocol, focal points should be aware of:

- (a) The main provisions of the two instruments;
- (b) The products (guidelines, reports, etc.) that are available, and where they can be found or ordered.

25. In addition to promotion at the national level, focal points can facilitate the promotion of the Convention and the Protocol at international events.

26. Other means to promote the Convention and the Protocol include:

- (a) Uploading information about the Convention and the Protocol to the homepages of the organizations or authorities the focal points are based at, with links to the websites of both instruments;

- (b) Translating the products developed under the Convention and the Protocol, including the brochures, into national language(s), as appropriate;

- (c) Regularly informing other national and local authorities (e.g., ministries of foreign affairs and justice) about the Convention and the Protocol, as well as about relevant developments;

- (e) Distributing flyers, brochures, links and other information about the Convention, the Protocol and their products during appropriate workshops and conferences at the national and international levels, as well as to other organizations;

- (f) Organizing side-events during appropriate national and international conferences to promote the Convention, the Protocol and their products;

- (g) Disseminating press releases produced by the secretariat to relevant ministries and other authorities, in particular their press units, to increase awareness;

- (h) Forwarding invitations to meetings and workshops under the Convention and the Protocol to possible interested partners, including academic institutions and NGOs at the national level, if appropriate;

(i) Referring, as appropriate, to the Convention and the Protocol when drawing up or updating relevant bilateral agreements.

27. Many of the measures described are also relevant for focal points for the European Union.

## **B. Non-governmental organizations**

28. Environmental NGOs were instrumental in the creation of the Aarhus Convention. They remain important supporters of the Convention and its Protocol, serve as sources of information and inspire action as partners on the ground. They also provide a key link with civil society in general. Focusing on NGOs can therefore be a relatively cost-effective way of spreading information and supporting implementation of the Convention and Protocol. Interested human rights organizations and institutions can also be useful to promote the Convention and Protocol due to the links between the environmental and human rights issues that the two instruments are offering. Another important target audience are non-profit environmental journalist networks. Trainings for media representatives about the purpose of the Convention and the Protocol and about how to use PRTRs might be an effective means to reach out to a broader public. The latter is also relevant for State or private media. In addition, youth NGOs are more and more involved in United Nations negotiation processes. They can be very useful stakeholders with regard to communication on the Convention and Protocol and they have a good reputation with young people.

29. It is also important to keep the private sector and industry-related organizations, including municipal services, aware of their obligations and rights in general, and especially concerning the PRTR Protocol.

30. Many activities described in the preceding section are also relevant for NGOs.

## **C. Aarhus Centres and Regional Environmental Centres**

31. The Aarhus Centres and Regional Environmental Centres, where established, also act as informational multipliers and can easily reach a wide audience within Governments and civil society organizations. The sharing of good practice and experience between centres and feedback on information tools and training needs can help these centres to further develop their work.

32. Many activities described in the section on “Governments” are also relevant for these organizations.

## **D. The public**

33. Members of the public need to be aware that they have three specific rights under the Convention: the right to know, the right to participate, and the right of access to justice. Communication with the public can be achieved in a cost-effective way through NGOs, Aarhus Centres, electronic tools, public forums open for a wide audience such as libraries and other local networks, radio interviews and newspaper articles, including on the extent of implementation and other newsworthy events, and the activities of environmental NGOs. Particular attention should be paid to radio, television and e-communication, bearing in mind their extensive reach and low cost. The increasingly important role of social networks and other electronic information tools, especially among young people, should be capitalized on. However, in more remote and poor areas access to the Internet may be

absent or limited. In this case more traditional media such as radio, television, newspapers or even storytelling or direct dialogue may be more appropriate.

34. Women are an important subset of the public target audience, including with a view to their roles as mothers, who are the first providers of education to young children. Women in particular often do not have full access to information and decision-making processes in their respective countries; special measures may therefore be required for this target group. Women are also often among the poorest in society and therefore lack the capacity and resources to use modern communication technologies.

35. When communicating with the public, it is important to keep the content relatively simple. This can be done by using direct and everyday language, focusing on easily digestible parts of the bigger picture, and making clear distinctions between the various elements covered by the Convention and Protocol. It is best to avoid speaking in jargon, because that will only be understandable for relatively few people. In contrast, storytelling or direct dialogue approaches can be an effective way to bring the Convention to life.

## **E. Donors**

36. Fund-raising allows the Convention to extend its work and is important for the continued development and expansion of the Convention. Fund-raising efforts are carried out mostly by the secretariat.

37. Working with a donor means developing a partnership whereby the needs of both donor and recipient are met. The donor must have confidence that activities are managed properly and that they produce the desired outcomes.

38. Donors, whether they are countries or foundations, will often require regular updates on the status of the activities they are funding. Ensuring that the information is readily available makes it more likely that funding will be received for future work. For this purpose, the secretariat prepares regular reports on implementation of the work programmes of the Convention and the Protocol.

## **F. International forums**

39. International forums<sup>1</sup> include any multilateral international environmental decision-making process, or any multilateral international organization when dealing with matters relating to the environment, for example secretariats of treaties, United Nations institutions and other international organizations. International forums are unlikely to be able to directly promote the work of the Convention and the Protocol in the way other target audiences do, but they may provide opportunities for Governments, the secretariat and stakeholders to promote the work of the Convention and the Protocol during formal sessions of major international events.

40. Side events can also be used to promote the Convention and the Protocol and their activities, but any side event or display should be consistent with the overall theme of the main conference or event and must be cost-effective. Getting side events on the official schedule often requires contacts within the host organization, as there is usually strong competition for space from other organizations and NGOs. Operating stalls or creating displays at major events is usually easier, but will often carry a fee, based on the size of the stall or display, and requires staff support to attend to the stall or display.

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<sup>1</sup> See the Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums (ECE/MP.PP/2005/2/Add.5)



## **G. Education providers**

41. As part of the public audience, children and young people in general should be considered a key subgroup. Children should be educated from an early age about the environment, and young people are usually keen followers of environmental concerns.

42. Education is an essential tool for good governance, informed decision-making and the promotion of democracy. Education providers are therefore an important audience. They are a powerful force in building knowledge and guiding lifestyles, especially for children and young people.

43. Schools and university departments, including law, environmental studies, information and communication technology (ICT) and journalism, can provide an effective information channel for the Convention to access legal practitioners and other relevant professionals. With respect to the PRTR Protocol, university departments for technical studies relevant to PRTRs, such as environmental science, chemistry, engineering and ICT, could be used as a communication channel. This can be done through adding the Convention and the Protocol to the curriculum, guest lecturers, etc.

44. Furthermore, the Convention and the Protocol are uniquely placed in being international legal agreements that can be utilized by law professionals in local and national legal systems.

45. Getting access to students does not need to be difficult. Many university lecturers are pressed for time and would welcome information about the Convention and Protocol.

46. To improve the chances of the Convention and Protocol being included in school and university materials, a standard presentation could be made available online. NFPs, Aarhus Centres, Regional Environmental Centres and NGOs could play a role in promoting the inclusion of the Convention and Protocol in national university curricula and materials used by professional institutions.

## **V. Communication products**

47. Communication products have been prioritized to ensure greatest efficiency, effectiveness and economy, by focusing on those which reach the widest audiences at the lowest economic and environmental cost. The focus is therefore on electronic tools and a general promotion pack.

### **A. Electronic tools**

48. The websites (the UNECE website for the Convention and the Protocol, the Aarhus Clearinghouse and PRTR.net global portal) should be regularly updated to keep them fresh and relevant. The information architecture (menu structure) of the websites also needs to be relatively simple and attractive, and the websites should be as small as possible to make it easier to find information.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The UNECE website is currently being migrated to a new content management system that will see some changes to the information architecture of the website. Activities related to electronic tools should be strengthened. However, due to resource constraints it remains a challenge for the secretariat to secure resources to maintain the website and, in particular, the two Web portals, in a professional way, with respect to both technical development and communication value.

49. The websites need to be promoted in order to be better known, in particular by the public. Governments, NGOs, Aarhus Centres, Regional Environmental Centres and other environmental conventions could, for example, promote it on their own website through links.

50. The use of other, more modern electronic information tools (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or other similar tools) to communicate with the different target audiences could also be explored, if they are easy and cost-effective.

51. Presentations about the Convention and the Protocol should be uploaded on their UNECE website in PowerPoint, for use by focal points and stakeholders.

## **B. Promotion pack for all target groups**

52. A general promotion pack should be designed in the form of attractive leaflets, written in a journalistic style and produced in the six United Nations languages. They should contain the key information about the Convention and the Protocol and about the key achievements of the work to date. It will also be important to have this promotion pack in national languages. Aarhus Centres, NGOs and NFPs could play a role here and take responsibility for translating the material into national languages and/or producing more focused information packs, where necessary.

## **C. Publications for all target groups**

53. The secretariat has already published a number of publications (printed and/or electronic) about the Convention and the Protocol, and more of such publications could be developed as appropriate.

## **D. Professional publications**

54. Professional publications are specialized types of media that are strongly targeted at a particular group, such as legal and technical professionals, rather than the general public. They are often in the form of subscription magazines or e-mailed newsletters.

55. Professional publications can offer great opportunities for spreading information about the work of the Convention and the Protocol, including on how to access and use the data included in PRTR registers. The content needs to be focused on the particular interest of the publication. Examples of such publications are the *European Journal of International Law* or the *European Law Journal*.

## **E. Event box**

56. An event box for participants at relevant events would contain all the information brochures, publications, posters and other available materials that will regularly be used by Convention secretariat staff at event stalls and displays at large international events. The event box simply keeps all the information in one place to save time and effort when preparing for an event. It can also be useful to check the contents of the box after events to see which information was distributed the most. This can help inform the secretariat about what materials people find the most useful, and help guide the creation of additional materials.

## Annex I

### **Survey for national focal points, Aarhus Centres and non-governmental organizations<sup>a</sup>**

**Overall, how satisfied are you with communications about the Convention and the Protocol ?**

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

**Which best describes your impression of communications about the Convention and the Protocol?**

- Keeps me fully informed
- Keeps me fairly well informed
- Keeps me adequately informed
- Gives me only a limited amount of information
- Doesn't tell me much about what's going on

**How well do you feel you know the Convention and the Protocol?**

- I know the Convention and the Protocol very well.
- I know a fair amount about the Convention and the Protocol.
- I know just a little about the Convention and the Protocol.
- I know almost nothing about the Convention and the Protocol.
- Knowing about the Convention is not important to me and the Protocol.

**What is the best thing about communications from the Convention and the Protocol?**

**Which information items do you believe it is very important that you receive communications about?**

- Working Groups (list)
- Bureau
- Meeting of the Parties
- Task Forces (list)
- Expert Groups (list)

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<sup>a</sup> The European ECO Forum will coordinate the survey for non-governmental organizations.

- Aarhus Centres
- General News

**What other topics do you feel are important for you to know more about and would you like to be included in future communications?**

**From which of the following sources do you now receive most of your information about what is going on regarding the Convention and the Protocol? Rank your top two information sources only.**

- The secretariat
- Website
- Publications
- Other (please specify)

**Which of the following sources do you usually use for work? Rank your top two information sources only.**

- Secretariat e-mail messages
- Website
- Publications
- Other (please specify)

**From which of the following sources would you prefer to receive most of your information about what is going on regarding the Convention and the Protocol?**

- The secretariat
- Website
- Publications
- Other (please specify)

**How often do you want to receive communication materials about the Convention and the Protocol?**

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Half yearly
- Yearly
- Other (please specify)

**How do you want to receive information about the activities of the Convention and the Protocol?**

- Personal communication
- Website
- Publications
- Other (please specify)

**Which messages/news encourage you to promote the Convention and the Protocol (directive from minister; suggestion from international organization; publication in mass media)?**

## Annex II

### Current communication products

(to be updated regularly)

<i>Communications product and activity</i>	<i>Date of product (created) and activity</i>	<i>Target audience</i>	<i>Objective</i>
<b>Aarhus Convention website</b>	Ongoing	All	Channel for public communication, dissemination and sharing of information
<b>Aarhus Clearinghouse website</b>	Ongoing	All	Channel for public communication, dissemination and sharing of information
<b>PRTR.net website</b>	Ongoing	All	Channel for public communication, dissemination and sharing of information
<b>Aarhus Implementation Guide</b> (print/online publication)	2000; updated version expected June 2011	Inter alia, Governments, NGOs, legal experts	Inform target audiences about effective implementation
<b>PRTR Implementation Guide</b> (print/online publication)	2008	Inter alia, Governments, NGOs, legal experts	Inform target audiences about effective implementation
<b>Guidance on the Aarhus Compliance Mechanism</b> (online publication)	2010	Inter alia, Governments, NGOs, public, legal experts	Inform target audiences about effective use of the Convention's compliance mechanism
<b>Your Right to a Healthy Environment</b> (print/online publication)	2006	All	Simplified guide on the Convention, providing information in everyday language for all audiences
<b>Your Right to a Healthy Community</b> (print/online publication)	2011	All	Simplified guide on the PRTR Protocol, providing information in everyday language for all audiences