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EXECUTIVE SECRETARY MEETS ITALIAN PRESIDENT

Ján Kubiš, UNECE Executive Secretary, met H.E. Mr. Giorgio Napolitano, President of the Republic of Italy, on 4 March, on the occasion of his visit to Geneva, to discuss issues of mutual interest.

The President of the Republic of Italy came to the Palais des Nations to deliver an address to the Human Rights Council. He then met senior officials of United Nations bodies based in Geneva, before visiting the exhibition "The Art of Trees," co-organized by UNECE and the Permanent Mission of Italy to celebrate the International Year of Forests. □



AARHUS REACHES OUT

A two-day workshop on 23 and 24 February 2011 discussed successes and future challenges in promoting public participation in international forums (PIIF).

Bearing fruit

The secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) briefed participants on improvements made to facilitate public participation at the Cancun Climate Conference in December 2010. This positive move followed lessons from the 2009 Copenhagen Conference and inputs from the Aarhus Convention PIIF workshop in June 2010. The need for increased flexibility regarding registration and participation rules and practice, and for further improvement of collaboration with civil society was stressed. The importance of civil society engagement by Governments in the national run-up to international events was also highlighted and Parties to the Aarhus Convention have important experience to help this process. The Italian Government demonstrated its national work in engaging civil society in preparations for international events on climate change, which included many modalities such as consultations with civil society on preparing a national position and having NGOs in the official delegation.



Principle and praised the Convention as an effective tool for making public participation a reality in the region and a source of inspiration for other countries. Many ideas were discussed concerning how Parties to the Aarhus Convention could organize their national preparations and share their experiences with Governments from other regions, in the run-up to Rio plus 20, through, for example, bilateral cooperation or collaborating with the host country. The French Government explained how it had already started working through an all-inclusive public participation process in 2007, on the run-up to Rio+20. Non-governmental organizations also shared their thoughts and plans. A high-level segment of the fourth session of the Convention's Meeting of the Parties (29 June -1 July 2011) will discuss the role of the Convention in promoting sustainable development. Lessons learned and good practices will inform a declaration, which the Meeting is planning to forward to the Rio+20 Conference thereby sharing its rich experience with other regions.

International Financial Institutions - new promoters of compliance

The debates revealed the challenges that International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and Parties are facing in ensuring that municipal institutions and private sector receiving IFI funding are fully aware of their legal obligations under the Aarhus Convention. Georgia spoke on its experience in this matter. Banks, such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank (EIB), can

Rio plus Aarhus – 20 years on

Reinforcing Principle 10 of the Rio 1992 Declaration, the source from which the Aarhus Convention sprang, is essential for achieving sustainable development. Participants discussed various ways of promoting the

themselves be a tool for promoting compliance with the Convention, through ensuring that the projects they fund are developed and implemented in accordance with the Convention's provisions. In that sense, they can be considered environmental decision makers, but how far can they go in asking for compliance and then refusing to fund projects because of non-compliance? How can they make sure that there is meaningful public participation? The EBRD extended an invitation to the Convention secretariat to open up a dialogue to identify tools needed by IFIs for verifying compliance with requirements at the project level and to develop guidance required for public utilities projects on obligations under the Aarhus Convention.

Closer to home

The workshop also heard presentations from the secretariats of three of the UNECE multilateral agreements (the Espoo Convention, the Industrial

Accidents Convention and the Protocol on Water and Health to the Water Convention). Although the Conventions' provisions foresee engagement of the public, a lack of public mobilization and presence was noticed as a challenge. Lack of public interest might be because the public assumed they were to be informed, but no more than that. They were not expecting to be invited to provide input, so, it was stressed that Parties and the secretariats need to make clear to the public what input is needed. Also, when issues are complex or not really "tangible", such as risk and safety and water and health, capacity-building is needed for both civil society and authorities. Another matter is the need for close inter-ministerial cooperation among all relevant authorities and involvement of the national focal points of the Aarhus Conventions to advise the public how it should be involved. In this regard, Armenia shared its national experience on applying multilateral agreements in the country. □

Information on the workshop is available at:

<http://www.unece.org/env/pp/ppif.htm>

SPAIN URGED TO FULFIL ITS OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE PROTOCOL ON VOLATILE ORGANIC COMPOUNDS



In December 2010, the Executive Body of the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution adopted decision 2010/5 on Spain's continuing and long-standing non-compliance with its emission reduction obligations under the 1988 Protocol on Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) or their Transboundary Fluxes.

Spain has been in non-compliance with its obligations under the Protocol (article 2.2(a)), which call for the implementation of effective measures to reduce its national annual emissions of VOCs by at least 30 per cent by the year 1999 (compared to 1988), since 1999.

In 2010, the Implementation Committee again regretted the insufficient progress made during the past year to bring the country into compliance. Although in 2010 it had noted an improvement in the exceeding of the VOCs

target — which had been reduced from 37 per cent in 2007 to 23 per cent in 2008, mainly owing to revisions of the methodologies to estimate VOCs emissions from the road transport sector and stationary engines and to a lesser extent to the impact of the economic recession — the Committee remained highly concerned by the fact that the latest projections provided by Spain still showed a gradual increase in total emissions after 2010. These projections showed that Spain did not expect to achieve compliance before 2020, by which time it will have been in non-compliance for more than 20 years.

In its decision, the Executive Body reiterated its increasing disappointment at the continuing failure of Spain to comply with its obligations. It strongly urged Spain to fulfil its obligations under the Protocol as soon as possible. In addition, it requested UNECE to bring this serious matter of non-compliance to the attention of the Minister of the Foreign Affairs and the Minister of the Environment of Spain, and also to present details of it to all the Parties to the Protocol, to the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy and to the wider public via the home page of the Convention and the newsletter of UNECE. Finally, Spain was called on to present a progress report to the next annual session of the Executive Body in line with decision 2010/5. □

For more information, please see the note prepared by the Secretariat at:

<http://www.unece.org/env/lrtap/welcome.html>

and the Executive Body decision 2010/5 at:

http://www.unece.org/env/lrtap/ExecutiveBody/Eb_decision.htm

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