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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

**COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY**

Meeting of the Signatories to  
the Convention on Access to Information,  
Public Participation in Decision-making and  
Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

**REPORT ON THE SECOND MEETING**

1. The second meeting of the Signatories to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters took place in Cavtat, Dubrovnik, Croatia, from 3 to 5 July 2000, at the invitation of the Government of Croatia and with financial support from the Governments of Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.
2. The meeting was attended by delegations from Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom and Uzbekistan.
3. The European Community was also represented.
4. Representatives of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Health Organisation's Regional Office for Europe (WHO/EURO) also attended.

5. The following non-governmental organizations were represented: Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund, European Chemical Industry Council (CEFIC), European ECO Forum, International Federation of Environmental Health (IFEH), International Union of Food (IUF), Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), and World Resources Institute (WRI). The environmental NGOs ECO-Accord (Russian Federation), Ecopravo-Lviv (Ukraine), Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide, Environmental Public Advocacy Center (Armenia), European Environmental Bureau, Friends of the Earth (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), Green Action (Croatia), Interactive Health Ecology Access Links (IHEAL), Mama-86 (Ukraine), Oekobüro (Austria), SHATIL (Israel) and TERRA Environmental Policy Center (Spain) were all represented under the auspices of the European ECO Forum.

6. The meeting was opened by Mr. B. Kovacevic, Croatia's Minister for Environment and Physical Planning. In his introductory statement, Mr. Kovacevic welcomed the participants and informed them of his country's activities in relation to the Convention. He emphasized the importance of strengthening the role that citizens and NGOs play in the protection of the environment as one of the basic, intrinsic values of an open democratic society and a key to securing sustainable development. He also expressed his country's commitment to ratifying the Convention, which it regarded as a unique vehicle for promoting more effective public participation in decision-making. He concluded by expressing the hope that the meeting would further a common commitment to enhancing environmental decision-making and strengthening civil society.

7. Mr. K. Bärlund, Director of the Environment and Human Settlements Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE), informed the Meeting about the activities of the secretariat to promote the Convention and facilitate its early entry into force. He cited the opinion of the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, that the Convention was the most ambitious venture in the area of 'environmental democracy' so far undertaken under the auspices of the United Nations, and urged Governments to maintain the momentum which had been established in Aarhus and Chisinau. He thanked the host country, the donor countries, the lead countries for each of the task forces, those countries which had hosted events and the members of the Advisory Board for their support, which had made the very full programme of work possible.

## **I. ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

8. The Chairperson, Mr. W. Kakebeeke (Netherlands), announced his intention to resign and not seek re-election. He emphasized the need to involve all Signatories in ECE activities under the Convention, noting that some were not represented due to the new financial rules concerning financial support for participants from countries with economies in transition. Various tributes were paid to Mr. Kakebeeke's contribution to the development of the Convention, initially in his key role as Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Working Group, which had negotiated the text of the Convention, and subsequently as Chairperson of the Meeting of the Signatories. He received a standing ovation from the Meeting.

9. The Meeting unanimously elected Mr. Francesco La Camera (Italy) as the new Chairperson, and Mr. Veit Koester (Denmark) and Mr. Jerzy Jendroska (Poland) as Vice-Chairpersons. It was agreed to establish a Bureau comprising seven people including the officers, with one being a representative of environmental NGOs, to assist the Chairperson in performing his duties with respect to the preparation of the next meeting and intersessional activities. It was agreed that the membership of the Bureau would not serve as a precedent in the context of future discussions on the draft rules of procedure. The following additional members were elected: Ms. Nevenka Preradovic (Croatia), Ms. Tatiana Tshakirova (Kazakhstan), Ms. Irene Bauer (Norway) and Ms. Fe Sanchis Moreno (NGO).

## **II. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

10. The Meeting adopted its agenda as contained in document CEP/WG.5/2000/1.

## **III. ACTIVITIES FOR PROMOTING THE CONVENTION'S RATIFICATION AND EFFECTIVE APPLICATION PENDING ITS ENTRY INTO FORCE**

11. The delegations informed the Meeting of the progress made by their Governments to ratify or accede to the Convention. A table had been circulated by the secretariat showing that Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan and Ukraine had already deposited their instruments of ratification, accession or approval with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The delegation of Romania informed the Meeting that its country had already ratified the Convention. Denmark, Estonia, France, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania (through a written report), Poland, Slovenia and Uzbekistan indicated that their countries expected to ratify or accede by the end of the year 2000. Austria, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain expected to do so early in 2001, and Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Sweden and the United Kingdom some time before the end of 2001. The European Community aimed to ratify in 2002 or 2003, and Switzerland in 2003. The delegations of Armenia, Croatia, Germany, Ireland, Slovakia and Tajikistan were unable to give specific target dates but the delegations of Germany and Ireland informed the Meeting that their countries were aiming to ratify as soon as possible. The delegation of Turkey stated its country's intention to accede by the end of 2000 or some time during 2001. It was noted that if these targets were met, the Convention would enter into force during the first half of 2001.

12. The delegations of Azerbaijan, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Finland, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Latvia (in absentia), Lithuania (in absentia), Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the United Kingdom, Uzbekistan and the European Commission had distributed written statements summarizing their activities carried out in relation to the Convention. Other delegations were encouraged to do so after the meeting. The secretariat stated its intention to place these reports on the Convention's web site so that the information would be available to members of the public with Internet access.

13. A representative of UNEP emphasised the high priority UNEP was giving to supporting activities under the Convention and referred to a number of specific initiatives being undertaken in close cooperation with the secretariat, including joint UNEP and UN/ECE awareness-raising workshops in the ECE region, information dissemination through the UNEP information networks, and the promotion of the Convention through a series of TV programmes and publications.

14. A representative of REC informed the Meeting about its activities to promote the implementation of the Aarhus Convention. These included contributions to the work of all three task forces, especially to the task force on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers; preparation of the Implementation Guide to the Aarhus Convention in cooperation with UN/ECE and the Danish Environmental Protection Agency; contributions to the handbook on "Good practices in public participation at the local level" prepared by the Government of the United Kingdom; organizing, with the support of the Government of the Netherlands, projects in central and eastern Europe to promote early ratification and implementation of the Convention and subregional workshops on the links between the Aarhus Convention and the European Union legislation; and organizing capacity-building workshops and training on public participation in south-east European countries, funded by the Danish Environmental Protection Agency.

15. The European ECO Forum informed the Meeting of its efforts to coordinate Aarhus Convention-related activities of environmental citizens' organizations through its Public Participation Campaigns Committee. The coalition produced a newsletter, "Participate", and maintained a Web site ([www.participate.org](http://www.participate.org)). A plain-language booklet produced by the coalition on "Citizens' environmental rights under the Aarhus Convention" was circulated to delegates in English. Russian and Ukrainian versions would become available soon. Delegations were invited to assist with the translation and distribution of this publication.

16. The European ECO Forum also presented some key points from the 'Dubrovnik Declaration', a statement adopted by an NGO conference which had taken place in the days immediately preceding the second meeting of the Signatories. In addition to the three task forces already established, three further task forces were proposed: on access to justice, on improving access to information through the use of electronic information technologies, and on public participation in plans, programmes, policies and regulations. The European Eco Forum expressed concern at the fact that no Western Governments had thus far ratified the Convention, which it believed was making it harder to convince some other Governments to ratify. In particular, it urged the European Community to ratify without any reservations and to apply the Convention's provisions in full to both EU laws and to the institutions of the European Community.

17. The representative of the World Resources Institute informed the Meeting of its activities aimed at promoting the application of the principles of the Convention in other international instruments, and in countries outside the ECE region. The representative of the IUF noted that there had been very limited involvement of trade unions in the processes under the Convention and urged that consideration should be given to finding ways of increasing their involvement.

The representative of IFEH expressed the hope that the Convention's principles would be applied in the sphere of health and offered to solicit the expertise of environmental health professionals in supporting the implementation of the Convention.

#### **IV. PREPARATIONS FOR THE FIRST MEETING OF THE PARTIES**

##### **A. Draft rules of procedure**

18. The secretariat presented a first draft of rules of procedure for the Meeting of the Parties (CEP/WG.5/2000/3), prepared at the request of the Meeting of the Signatories, and explained the approach that had been taken in preparing the draft. The text had drawn heavily on the rules of procedure of the Espoo Convention and the draft rules of procedure being prepared under the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, among others. However, a number of innovative elements had been introduced to reflect the particular nature and subject matter of the Aarhus Convention, mainly relating to access to information and NGO involvement in the work.

19. The Meeting welcomed the draft prepared by the secretariat and thanked it for its work. It was agreed that a further draft should be drawn up by an open-ended intergovernmental working group, with involvement of NGOs. It was agreed that NGOs should be invited to participate in each of the task forces or working groups established under the auspices of the Convention. In order to facilitate the work of the group, it was proposed that delegations should be invited to submit written comments on the draft rules to the secretariat by 15 September 2000, which the secretariat would then compile and distribute in due time before the meeting.

20. A number of suggestions for changes to the draft rules were presented during the discussion. It was agreed that decision making should follow usual UN/ECE practice, presumably based on consensus, and that the ideas in draft rules 36 and 45 should not be pursued further. The Meeting requested the task force and working group to discuss further the proposal to invite the NGOs to be represented on the Bureau.

##### **B. Task force on Compliance**

21. The report of the task force on compliance was presented by Mr. Alistair McGlone (United Kingdom) (CEP/WG.5/2000/4).

22. The Meeting welcomed the report of the task force and thanked the task force and especially its Chairperson for their work. During the discussion, the need to take in particular the optionality requirement contained in article 15 of the Convention into account was underlined. It was agreed that the task force should also try to establish a catalogue of possible measures to prevent non-compliance and to respond to it.

23. It was agreed that the task force should meet again before the end of the year 2000 to carry out further work on the subject. Following this, an open-ended intergovernmental working

group should be established, chaired by Mr. McGlone, to draw up a text for a draft decision establishing a compliance mechanism, with the intention that this would be adopted at the first meeting of the Parties. It was agreed that this working group would also be charged with the task of drawing up the next draft of the rules of procedure.

24. It was agreed that the strengthening of reporting requirements was important and it was suggested that such work might be one of the first tasks of any committee established by the decision relating to the compliance mechanism to be presented to the Parties at their first meeting.

### **C. Task Force on pollutant release and transfer registers**

25. Mr Ondrej Velek (Czech Republic) presented the report of the task force on pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs) (CEP/WG.5/2000/5). He emphasized that there had been broad agreement among the experts in the Task Force on the need for an instrument on PRTR to be established under the Convention. He informed the Meeting that the Czech Republic was willing to continue in its role as Chair of the Task Force on PRTR and a possible future working group, but would be interested in sharing the role with an interested country.

26. REC informed the meeting of the outcome of the workshop held in Szentendre, Hungary, on 14-16 June 2000 on "Developing PRTR Systems in Central and Eastern Europe" as a part of its project funded by the United States Environmental Protection Fund (US/EPA). The workshop participants had recommended that the Meeting of the Signatories should consider supporting the establishment of a working group to develop a legally binding international instrument on PRTR under the Aarhus Convention and outlined some of the main components of such an instrument.

27. The European Community proposed to amend paragraph 29 of annex I to the report of the Task Force so as to more accurately reflect the state of progress towards establishing a European pollutant emissions register within the framework of the European Union's Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Directive. The Meeting agreed that a written text circulated by the Commission should replace the previous text of the paragraph in question (see CEP/WG.5/2000/5/Corr.1).

28. The Meeting:

(a) Thanked the Czech Republic for its productive and comprehensive work as lead country;

(b) Welcomed the report of the Task Force on PRTRs as a basis for the development of a legally binding instrument under the Aarhus Convention which would establish in a step-by-step manner coherent, nationwide PRTRs systems;

(c) Agreed to propose to the Committee on Environmental Policy that the mandate of the Task Force on PRTRs should be enlarged to that of an open-ended inter-governmental working group, charged with the preparation of such a legally binding instrument, with a view to having the draft instrument ready for adoption at the Fifth Ministerial 'Environment for Europe' Conference (Kiev, 2002);

(d) Agreed to invite the participation of additional countries in the working group, to increase the breadth of representation, incorporate needed expert capacities, and secure the necessary resources to maintain the working group;

(e) Agreed that, in order to avoid duplication, account should be taken of work already undertaken in other international forums.

#### **D. Task force on genetically modified organisms**

29. Mr Helmut Gaugitsch (Austria) presented the report of the task force on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) (CEP/WG.5/2000/6). The task force had examined national experiences and examples of good practice and had drawn up recommendations to further implement public access to information on GMO-related issues. Regarding public participation in GMO-related issues, the task force had identified and started to discuss various options and issues to consider further when applying article 6 of the Convention to genetically modified organisms.

30. The Meeting welcomed the report of the task force on GMO and thanked Austria for leading the task force and Bulgaria for hosting its first meeting in Sofia, Bulgaria.

31. The Meeting considered the recommendations on public access to information on GMO-related issues and the examples of good practice described in paragraphs 15 to 18 of the report to be a useful contribution to the work ongoing in this area.

32. Regarding public participation, it invited the task force to continue to openly explore all options and issues addressed in the report, and to propose a definition of "deliberate release" of GMOs for the purpose of the Convention (see paragraph 28 of the report).

33. With regard to the procedural options listed in paragraph 25 regarding public participation in decisions on genetically modified organisms, it was considered that it would be premature for the Meeting to make a choice between these options. It was noted that the list of options was not necessarily complete; for example, an additional option might be to add a new annex related to genetically modified organisms. It was therefore agreed to invite the task force to reconvene to examine the merits of the various possible options in more detail.

34. It was agreed that the task force, inter alia, in order to avoid duplication of work, should continue to take account of work being undertaken in other forums, notably under the auspices of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and specifically the Biosafety Clearing-House envisaged

under that Protocol, and should invite the interim secretariat of the clearing-house to participate in its work.

35. Noting the wish of the Ministers that this issue should be addressed at the first meeting of the Parties ECE/CEP/43/Add.1/Rev, para. 15), it was agreed that the outcome of the next meeting of the task force, including on the options with respect to public participation in decisions on GMOs, should be presented to an open-ended intergovernmental working group, which would prepare a draft decision for the Meeting of the Parties.

36. In application of the Convention's principles, the task force was invited to demonstrate in its work good practice in electronic networking and public participation.

## **V. OTHER ELEMENTS IN THE WORKPLAN OR ARISING FROM THE FIRST MEETING OF THE SIGNATORIES OR THE SIXTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY**

### **A. Public participation at local level**

37. The delegation of the United Kingdom reported on the outcome of an international workshop on public participation at local level, held in Newcastle, United Kingdom, on 6-7 December 1999 (CEP/WG.5/2000/7). Copies of a handbook of good practices drawing on some of the case studies that had been presented at the workshop, which had just been published in English and would shortly be available in Russian, were made available at the meeting. The handbook would be distributed on CD-ROM and posted on the Convention's Web site. The intention was to update the case studies on the web site as new ones came to light.

38. The Meeting thanked the United Kingdom for taking on the task of organizing what was considered to have been an extremely successful event, and warmly welcomed the handbook as a useful contribution to promoting good practices in public participation.

### **B. The Convention in Central Asia**

39. Mr. Jerzy Jendroska (Poland) informed the Meeting of the outcome of a workshop on the Convention, which had taken place in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, on 4-7 May 2000, involving participants from Governments and non-governmental organizations from the five Central Asian member States of ECE. The workshop had been the result of a collaborative effort between UN/ECE, UNEP and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, with financial assistance provided by the Governments of Austria, Denmark and Norway. The workshop had identified major issues in implementing the Aarhus Convention in Central Asia as well as good practices and possible practical means of implementation. It also provided possible directions for further assistance in implementing the Convention in Central Asia. An informal written report was circulated (available in English only).



40. The delegation of Kazakhstan expressed the view that the Ashgabat workshop had been extremely useful for the Central Asian region and informed the Meeting of the outcome of the recent meeting of Ministers from the Central Asian region within the framework of the Intergovernmental Commission for Sustainable Development (Kazakhstan, 21-22 June 2000).

41. The secretariat emphasized the importance of such workshops as a very practical way of promoting better understanding of the Convention and thereby assisting its implementation. Further workshops were being planned or considered, using the experience gained from the Ashgabat workshop. It invited countries interested in hosting or taking part in such workshops to notify the secretariat of this.

42. A representative of UNEP informed the Meeting of one such planned workshop for the South Caucasus region, which was scheduled to take place in autumn 2000.

### **C. Implementation Guide on the Convention**

43. The Meeting was informed that the Implementation Guide on the Convention, produced as a collaborative project of the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), the Danish Environmental Protection Agency and ECE, had reached the point of publication. Advance copies of the Guide, in English and in Russian, were distributed to participants. The foreword to the Guide had been contributed by the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. It was hoped that the Guide would serve as a valuable tool to assist countries in implementing the Convention.

### **D. Development of information and outreach tools**

44. The secretariat informed the Meeting of measures taken, or planned, for the purpose of improving communication and dissemination of information about the Convention and activities under its auspices. The decision at the previous meeting to establish national focal points had greatly facilitated communication with Governments, though a number of Governments had yet to designate their focal points. The Convention's Web site ([www.unece.org/env/pp](http://www.unece.org/env/pp)) had been significantly expanded and improved. A publication on the Convention aimed at youth was being developed in conjunction with UNEP, and further publications were envisaged. Initial preparations for a series of TV documentaries, to be produced by Television Trust for the Environment as part of the Earth Report series, were under way with support from UNEP. Presentations on the Convention had been given by the secretariat and Advisory Board members at various conferences and seminars. Notwithstanding these activities, the intention of the secretariat was to increase the priority given to raising general awareness of the Convention in the following year.

### **E. Future activities on access to justice**

45. The European ECO Forum presented a paper proposing the creation of a task force on access to justice (CEP/WG.5/2000/8). It maintained that the third pillar of the Convention

(access to justice) would be likely to prove the most difficult to implement, but that, without it, effective implementation of the other two pillars would not be successful. The European ECO Forum particularly stressed the financial barriers to access to justice, as well as the need to take concrete steps to broaden access to justice and the need to consider assistance mechanisms and pilot projects.

46. The meeting agreed to establish a task force on access to justice to support the implementation of the third pillar of the Convention. Estonia expressed willingness to take a lead in the new task force, and Finland offered financial support for the task force's activities. The Netherlands also indicated that it could make a substantive contribution in the light of experiences gained in this field. The Meeting welcomed these offers.

47. It was agreed that the task force should focus on means of practical implementation, such as pilot projects, measures to remove financial obstacles to those seeking access to justice and consideration of assistance mechanisms, rather than engage in efforts to extend or refine the legal framework provided by the Convention. It should gather information on good practices and provide a forum for exchange of experience, building also on the workshop of the European Union Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law (IMPEL) held in the Hague, Netherlands, in May 2000. An effort should be made to provide models, concrete solutions, and problem-solving approaches in the implementation of article 9. It was agreed that representatives of Ministries of Justice should be invited to participate. Consideration should be given to holding a workshop.

#### **F. Possible instrument on strategic environmental assessment; public participation in programmes, plans, policies and legislation**

48. It was decided to discuss the agenda item dealing with strategic environmental assessment (item 5 (f)) in conjunction with that dealing with public participation in programmes, plans, policies and legislation (item 5 (g)), given the overlap in subject matter.

49. REC presented the background document 'Key issues in the implementation of article 7 on plans, programmes and policies, and article 8 on regulations and laws' (CEP/WG.5/2000/10), which it had prepared jointly with the European ECO Forum. It expressed the view that effective implementation of Article 7 of the Convention would require the existence of some form of strategic environmental assessment and that the topics were therefore closely linked. REC and the European ECO Forum were in favour of a task force being established to work on the issues covered by Articles 7 and 8, including but not limited to the issue of strategic environmental assessment.

50. The Meeting noted the recent decision of the Espoo Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment to proceed with the preparation of a draft protocol on strategic environmental assessment (SEA). There was general agreement on the importance of the provisions of the Aarhus Convention being fully taken into account in this process, and on the need for the

expertise of officials and NGOs involved in public participation issues to be made available to the process.

51. With this in mind, the Meeting agreed to request the Committee on Environmental Policy to invite all UN/ECE States to ensure that the provisions of the Aarhus Convention were reflected in the SEA protocol and that those involved in the Aarhus process be represented in the negotiations on the SEA protocol to the Espoo Convention. Work undertaken in other international forums should be taken into account.

52. The Meeting further agreed to entrust the Committee with requesting the UN/ECE secretariat to:

(a) Involve the Secretaries to both the Aarhus and Espoo Conventions in the informal drafting group on the SEA protocol as well as in the subsequent negotiations;

(b) Ensure that invitations to the group negotiating the SEA protocol were sent to all focal points of both the Aarhus Convention and the Espoo Convention.

53. The Meeting recommended that the proposed protocol should be open to non-Parties to the Espoo Convention as well as to Parties, including non-ECE States, through incorporation of a provision similar to article 19, paragraph 3, of the Aarhus Convention.

54. Taking into account the number of task forces and working groups and the need to avoid duplication of efforts, the Meeting decided that consideration of the proposal to establish a task force on articles 7 and 8 submitted by REC and the European ECO Forum should be deferred. However, the Meeting agreed to hold a workshop in order to develop ideas and make suggestions regarding public participation under articles 7 and 8 with a view to supporting the drawing-up of a protocol on SEA to the Espoo Convention. The workshop would also address health impacts. The focal points of both the Aarhus and Espoo Conventions would be invited, with a view to furthering cooperation between the two Conventions. The workshop would be organized by the Czech Republic and Norway, with support from WHO/EURO. The practical arrangements would be handled by REC. Italy offered to provide financial support.

55. There was general agreement on the desirability of the proposed protocol being ready for adoption at the Fifth Ministerial 'Environment for Europe' Conference (Kiev, 2002).

### **G. Electronic information**

56. A paper on the topic of electronic information tools prepared jointly by the European ECO Forum, REC and UNEP-INFOTERRA (CEP/WG.5/2000/11) was presented by REC, with supplementary remarks from the other two sponsoring organizations. It was proposed that a task force with a practical rather than a legal focus should be set up. It would be oriented towards supporting the implementation of the Convention through promoting good practices in the field of electronic information tools.

57. The Meeting welcomed the paper and thanked its authors for their work. The issue was generally agreed to be one of great and growing importance. It was agreed to establish a task force on the topic, to be led by Austria. The lead country would work in close cooperation with the three organizations which had been responsible for preparing the paper as well as with the European Environment Agency. Norway offered to host a workshop on the topic in 2001, as the first major activity of the task force. This offer was gratefully accepted. A first coordination meeting was scheduled to take place in Dublin, on the occasion of the UNEP-INFOTERRA Global Conference on Access to Environmental Information (11-15 September 2000). Reflecting the nature of its subject matter, the task force would function to a large extent using electronic means of communication.

## **H. Environment and Health**

58. A representative of WHO/ EURO reported on the relevant outcomes of the Third European Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (London, 16-18 June 1999). Public participation had been one of the main themes of the Conference and the central importance of the Convention had been noted in this regard. Significant support had been expressed for a legally binding instrument on strategic environmental assessment, and the Ministers had agreed that steps should be taken to make better use of electronic tools with a view to providing the public with streamlined, low-cost and timely access to environmental and health information. It was also noted that the process of NGO involvement in the negotiation and early implementation of the Aarhus Convention had provided an inspiring model which had led to similar arrangements being made for the London Conference. The WHO/EURO representative concluded by urging countries to ratify the Protocol on Water and Health, which had certain provisions on public participation similar to those in the Aarhus Convention, as soon as possible.

### **I. Interlinkages between ECE conventions**

59. The secretariat informed the Meeting of plans to hold a round table during the seventh session of the Committee on Environmental Policy (25-29 September 2000) involving the governing bodies of the ECE environmental conventions and protocols together with delegations to the Committee, to consider measures to increase cooperation and synergies between the different multilateral environmental agreements and make them more effective.

60. The Meeting recommended that the occasion be used to put forward measures promoting the application of the principles and provisions of the Aarhus Convention in the other conventions and protocols, both with respect to their substance and with respect to their procedures. Specifically, it was proposed that the round table should be invited to consider the possibility of recommending the drawing up of guidelines on the modalities of involving NGOs, as representatives of the public concerned, in the processes and activities of ECE multilateral environmental agreements. Such guidelines, which might also be relevant to multilateral environmental agreements in general, could be drawn up with the involvement of the main stakeholders (including representatives of governing bodies, secretariats and NGOs) with the

coordination of the drafting process being carried out by the Aarhus Convention's secretariat. The ideas being discussed in the draft rules of procedure for the Aarhus Convention could be relevant in this regard, though it was agreed that it would be premature to circulate the draft rules at this stage. It was agreed that the themes of compliance and effective and coordinated reporting would also be suitable topics to raise during the round table.

## **VI Funding of activities under the Convention**

61. The secretariat thanked Governments for the financial support received since the first meeting of the Signatories, and reminded the Meeting of the ongoing need for funding, in particular in the light of the increased workload which would result from the decisions already taken during the meeting.

62. The possibility of establishing financial arrangements in accordance with article 10, paragraph 3, of the Convention, so as to provide a more stable basis for activities under the Convention, was briefly discussed. The Meeting requested the secretariat to prepare a note in advance of the first meeting of the Parties setting out possible alternatives for funding arrangements.

## **VII Future meetings**

63. The Meeting considered the question of whether a third meeting of the Signatories would be required, taking into account the likelihood that the Convention would enter into force during 2001.

64. It was agreed that, in general, the main documentation being prepared for the first meeting of the Parties should be considered by an intergovernmental meeting group or groups. Some delegations felt that the various intergovernmental working groups already envisaged for the different topics would be sufficient for this purpose and that a third meeting of the Signatories would be a waste of resources, whereas others felt that it was necessary for all the documentation for the Meeting of the Parties to be reviewed at a single meeting. It was generally agreed that there were too many uncertainties, e.g. concerning the dates of entry into force and of the Fifth Ministerial 'Environment for Europe' Conference in Kiev, to allow for a definitive recommendation to be made at this stage.

65. Taking these factors into account, the Meeting agreed to recommend to the Committee on Environmental Policy that a third meeting of the Signatories should be provisionally scheduled to take place during the period September to November 2001, but that in the event of the entry into force taking place earlier than anticipated, the Bureau would have a mandate to cancel the proposed meeting and to convene instead a meeting of an open-ended ad hoc working group to prepare the documentation for the first meeting of the Parties. It was agreed that the Bureau should seek to ensure maximum synergy in selecting dates and venues, and that Bureau members should consult with their respective constituencies to the extent feasible before reaching a decision.

### **VIII Relevance of the Convention to the 'Rio + 10' conference**

66. The secretariat drew the attention of the Meeting to the opinion of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi A. Annan, expressed in his foreword to the Aarhus Convention Implementation Guide, that the Convention, although regional in scope, had a global significance and represented by far the most impressive elaboration of principle 10 of the Rio Declaration. The Secretary-General had gone on to indicate that the 2002 Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Earth Summit would be a timely occasion to examine the relevance of the Convention as a possible model for strengthening the application of that principle in other regions of the world.

67. A representative of UNEP informed the Meeting of an informal consultation on the topic which had taken place in Rome in May 2000, organized jointly by UN/ECE and UNEP and hosted by the Italian Government. The consultation had brought governmental and non-governmental experts from different regions of the world together with members of the Advisory Board to discuss ways of promoting principle 10 in other regions. The importance of awareness-raising and the key role of NGOs at regional level were emphasized. The Meeting was also informed of a project by the World Resources Institute involving the development of a set of indicators to assess progress in this field in selected countries and regions, and the promotion of good practices. Development of set of indicators to assess transparency.

68. It was agreed that efforts should be made to ensure that the issues covered by the Aarhus Convention were placed on the agenda of the 2002 Special Session and the preparatory meetings, and that the Convention itself should be promoted as a possible model or tool of inspiration. It was noted that the topic of information was already a major theme for the ninth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The European ECO Forum urged Signatories to use the opportunity of the 2002 Special Session to promote global guidelines based on the Aarhus Convention, and to use the ninth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development to build support for this goal.

### **IX Conclusion**

69. The Chairperson closed the meeting and, on behalf of the participants, thanked the Government of Croatia for the excellent arrangements it had made to host the meeting.