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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 FIRST MEETING

1. The first meeting of the Signatories to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, open to all ECE countries, took place in Chisinau (Republic of Moldova) from 19 to 21 April 1999, at the invitation of the Government of the Republic of Moldova and with financial support from the Governments of Italy and Austria.
2. The meeting was attended by delegations from Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and Uzbekistan.
3. The Commission of the European Communities was also represented.
4. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) also attended.
5. The following non-governmental organizations were represented: American Bar Association Central and East European Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI), Environmental NGO Coalition, GLOBE Europe Network. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) also attended.

6. In his introductory statement, Mr. D. Diacov, Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, welcomed participants and informed them of his country's ratification of the Convention. He underlined the importance of the Convention both for the legislative framework in his country and more generally for environmental stability in Europe. 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. For instance, the UN/ECE secretariat was taking the initiative, in cooperation with the Government of Denmark, to produce an "Aarhus Convention implementation guide", and an advisory board to the secretariat had been set up. Mr. A. Capcelea, Minister of the Environment, delivered a message on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Moldova. He highlighted the essential role of transparency and public participation in ensuring that environmental protection has priority in the economic reconstructing in countries in transition. He also presented a plan of action to implement the Convention in the Republic of Moldova. Mr. I. Dediu, Chairman of the Parliamentary Commission for Agriculture, Ecology and Processing Industry, addressed the Meeting and stressed the role of the Convention in helping to address the challenges of the 21st century.

I. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

7. The Meeting adopted its agenda as contained in document CEP/WG.5/1999/1.

II. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

8. The Meeting unanimously elected Mr. W. Kakebeeke (Netherlands) as Chairman and Mr. A. Capcelea (Republic of Moldova) as Vice-Chairman.

III. POST-AARHUS ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE THE CONVENTION'S RATIFICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION PENDING ITS ENTRY INTO FORCE

9. The delegations informed the Meeting of the progress made by their respective Governments to ratify or accede to the Convention. Austria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Norway, Romania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Ukraine would finalize their processes of ratification by the end of 1999 or the beginning of 2000. Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Latvia, Poland, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom would finalize their processes of ratification by the end of 2000. The Governments of Belarus, Germany, Hungary, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, Switzerland and Uzbekistan were also taking steps to ratify or accede to the Convention. The delegations of Denmark and the Netherlands presented their activities to support Convention-related efforts in countries in transition.

10. The delegation of Denmark presented the concept for the "Aarhus Convention implementation guide", which is aimed at helping countries to implement the Convention, and informed the meeting that REC had been contracted to prepare the guide together with a number of experts of various backgrounds.

11. The delegations of Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, the Republic of Moldova and Romania distributed written statements presenting their countries' activities.

12. The representatives of the European Commission informed the Meeting of its strategy to ratify the Aarhus Convention and presented the report of the TACIS Awareness Raising Programme on the ratification and early implementation of the Convention. Both the strategy document and the report were distributed.

13. The representatives of REC, GLOBE and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe informed the Meeting about their Convention-related activities. They wished to be involved in any further work and processes undertaken under the Convention. REC also presented information on the major trends in the ratification of the Aarhus Convention in central and eastern Europe, and made available written assessments based on the first results of the project "Network of Independent Experts for Early Implementation and Compliance Monitoring of the Aarhus Convention."

14. A representative of UNEP made a statement on behalf of its Executive Director, Mr. K. Toepfer, reporting on the Convention-related activities of UNEP. The statement and the Washington Statement by the members of the UNEP/INFOTERRA Advisory Committee on the reform of the UNEP global environmental exchange network, INFOTERRA, to ensure better public access to environmental information were distributed.

15. The NGOs Coalition thanked Governments and the secretariat for their continued commitment to NGO involvement in the official process and for the ample opportunity given to participate in the meeting. The Meeting was informed about the NGO activities under the Convention at both national and international level, including the results of the Conference of NGOs held in Chisinau on 17-18 April 1999. The Conference had been attended by 120 NGO delegates from 33 countries. It had approved an extension of the Public Participation Campaigns Committee and adopted a declaration setting out the main concerns and priorities of the NGOs regarding the implementation and further development of the Convention. The NGOs had called, inter alia, for a non-compliance mechanism, the extension of the Convention's principles to international bodies, the full application of its public participation provisions to decision-making on releases of genetically modified organisms, the adoption of a legally binding protocol on pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTR), the recognition of electronic access to information as a right, safeguarding of the Convention's implementation through access to

justice and development of best practices in this respect, and the recognition of the link between environmental problems and health issues. The NGOs had suggested that three additional task forces should be set up: one on public participation in programmes, policies, plans and legislation, one on access to justice, and one on electronic access to information. The Declaration from the NGO Conference was distributed.

16. The Meeting was informed about the forthcoming London Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health and its importance as a possible source of guidance on extending the principles of the Convention to health issues. The two draft documents prepared for the London Conference were distributed.

17. The secretariat presented and distributed information about possible cooperation between the Aarhus Convention and the UN/ECE Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents and reported on the seventh meeting of the Signatories to this Convention.

18. The Meeting:

(a) Took note with satisfaction of the progress made by Governments in their processes of ratification of, or accession to, the Convention;

(b) Noted with appreciation that the Republic of Moldova had already finalized its ratification procedure and that 22 other countries would do so by the end of 2000 and acknowledged that, to meet the Committee on Environmental Policy's target for the Convention to enter into force in the year 2000, at least 16 countries would need to ratify by the end of September 2000;

(c) Noted that delegations expressed the need for focusing on parliaments and individual parliamentarians in the ratification processes and emphasised the role of international organizations and NGOs in these processes.

IV PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE CONVENTION - SHARING EXPERIENCE, NEED FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

19. Mr. A. Capcelea, who chaired this session, underlined in his opening words that ratification of the Convention should not be considered as an end in itself. Many further efforts had to be made to apply the Convention in practice, in particular at the local level. Although the Convention provided a framework, there was a need for sharing experience related to the practical steps to implement it, such as: harmonizing national legislation with its provisions, setting up a national institutional system for implementing the Convention and its economic and financial aspects, as well as providing training and technical assistance, especially to the newly independent States and central and east European countries.

20. The delegation of Hungary presented and distributed information about Hungary's experience and the practical arrangements it had made to facilitate public participation in the preparation of plans, strategies etc.

21. The delegation of Spain reported on the experience and practical arrangements made at central and regional levels to distribute environmental information. It underlined the effectiveness in terms of costs, resources and time, of using electronic means of information. Also, the delegations of Austria, France and the Netherlands presented their experience with providing information in this way. Written information about the Spanish and Austrian experience was distributed.

22. The Meeting was informed about the Czech Republic's experience with public participation in strategic environmental impact assessment and in the preparation of draft laws, as well as about its preparatory work to introduce the pollutant release and transfer register (PRTR) system.

23. The delegation of Norway informed the Meeting about its experience with public participation in procedures to control the release of genetically modified organisms.

24. Delegations taking part in the discussion expressed the need for:

(a) Establishing a list of focal points for the Convention, with the possibility of using the Infoterra Network to this end;

(b) Putting emphasis on promoting the implementation of the Convention at the local level;

(c) Examining the links between the Aarhus Convention and other UN/ECE conventions;

(d) Addressing the specific needs of countries in transition, which required not only a legal framework but also resources to increase capacity in terms of manpower and technical infrastructure, in particular to create information centres and provide a sufficient flow of information within the Government;

(e) Increasing the use of web pages to distribute information;

(f) Providing training for governmental officials and the judiciary;

(g) Coordinating the Convention-related efforts of various actors; and

(h) Providing assistance in the form of handbooks and guides on implementation.

They observed that even though practices with respect to electronic information were improving, there was no corresponding provision of public rights to receive information through this means.

25. The Meeting took note of the need to address the issue of public participation at the local level. It also noted the need to establish focal points and to provide training at all levels of government and the judiciary. The Meeting acknowledged the increased use of electronic means of distributing information, and the need to support modern information centres.

V. PREPARATIONS FOR THE FIRST MEETING OF THE PARTIES

VI. WORK-PLAN AND FINANCING ACTIVITIES UNDER THE CONVENTION

26. The Meeting decided to discuss these two agenda items jointly, as they were closely related, and to follow the order of the work-plan (CEP/WG.5/1999/3) in addressing them.

A. General objectives and means

27. At the invitation of the Chairman, delegations discussed the need for having a second meeting of the Signatories. The delegations of Belgium and France considered it premature to decide about such a need at this stage. The delegation of Switzerland considered a second meeting vital, and the delegations of Austria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, the Republic of Moldova and the United Kingdom supported the proposal to hold such a meeting.

28. Mr. K. Bärlund presented the members of the Advisory Board to the secretariat. They had been endorsed by the Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy. They would serve in their personal capacity and on a self-financing basis. They had been invited because of their long-standing activities related to issues covered in the Convention. The Board's Terms of Reference were distributed.

29. The delegation of Italy supported the establishment of the Advisory Board and its composition. The delegation of the Republic of Moldova suggested supplementing the Board with a member from a government of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

30. The delegation of the United Kingdom supported the general objectives and means of the work-plan. It suggested following the Espoo Convention's methodology in organizing task forces and workshops and offered to share experience in this respect.

31. The delegation of France made the following statement:

"France expresses its reticence regarding the multiplication of international institutions which this draft decision, once again, leads to,

without any sufficient prior evaluation. In particular, it questions the status, legitimacy and concrete objectives of this institution and regrets the lack of transparency in setting it up. France, however, is not against its creation if this is supported by a large number of delegations, as long as its financing is not charged to the regular budget of the UN/ECE. France hopes that there will be the greatest transparency in the designation of members of this institution."

32. The Signatories decided to hold their second meeting in spring of the year 2000.

B. Promotion, ratification and implementation of the Convention

1. Translations

33. Delegations taking part in the discussion indicated the need for official translations into their national languages, and suggested making such translations generally accessible via the Internet.

34. The Meeting:

(a) Found it necessary for all countries to officially translate the Convention into their national languages;

(b) Requested that official translations into national languages should be sent in electronic form to the UN/ECE secretariat;

(c) Welcomed the secretariat's efforts to translate the Convention into the official languages of the United Nations, noting with appreciation that the Convention was available in Spanish.

2. Identification of problems and sharing of experience

35. Delegations taking part in the discussion suggested:

(a) Broadening the scope of this work-plan item from "identification of problems" to "identification of good practice, problems and opportunities";

(a) That the secretariat should list the key issues raised in the discussion, such as public participation at the local level and public participation in strategic environmental impact assessment.

36. The delegation of the United Kingdom confirmed its willingness to organize a workshop in autumn 1999, as referred to in paragraph 18 of the work-plan, and suggested focusing it on public participation at the local level.

37. The Meeting approved the reformulated provisions of the work-plan to reflect the outcome of the discussion.

3. Implementation handbook

38. REC reported on the preparation of the implementation guide. The project description was distributed.

39. The NGOs Coalition presented the idea of an NGO advocacy manual, as a complementary tool to the implementation guide, and asked for support in this respect.

40. The Meeting:

(a) Noted with appreciation the initiative to produce the Aarhus Convention Implementation Guide (referred to in paragraphs 21-24 of the work-plan). It would be sponsored by the Government of Denmark, prepared by REC, and published by UN/ECE;

(b) Took note of the NGO initiative to produce an NGO advocacy manual.

4. Inventory of activities and available funding

5. Bringing together all actors

41. Delegations taking part in the discussion:

(a) Suggested that the list of focal points should cover not only governments but also international organizations, institutions and NGOs;

(b) Advocated making use of the existing Infoterra Network;

(c) Proposed exploring the possibility of establishing a permanent funding mechanism that would support NGO participation in both international activities and the implementation work at national level.

42. The Meeting therefore:

(a) Requested the secretariat to prepare an official document to explain the objectives and nature of the Convention, and the importance of NGO participation in its activities;

(b) Decided to adopt the reformulated part of the work-plan to indicate that Governments may consider using the focal points for Infoterra to this end.

C. Preparation for the Meeting of the Parties

1. Rules of procedure

43. The Meeting requested the secretariat to draft preliminary rules of procedure, as referred to in paragraphs 33-36 of the work-plan.

2. Compliance mechanisms

44. Delegations taking part in the discussion indicated the need to establish a task force and suggested drawing from the experience in compliance mechanisms not only from international environmental instruments but also from human rights instruments.

45. The delegation of the United Kingdom informed the Meeting about the way the Task Force dealing with the compliance mechanism was organized under the Espoo Convention.

46. The delegations of Italy, Germany and the Netherlands offered to consider providing financial support to a task force on the understanding that the delegation of the United Kingdom would be able to assume responsibility for leading it.

47. The delegation of the United Kingdom agreed to take the lead in this task force and suggested that delegations should express their initial interest in participating in its work, and then within three months confirm this interest by supplying the secretariat with contact details of their experts.

48. The following delegations did so: Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, REC, and the NGOs Coalition.

49. The Meeting:

(a) Decided to establish a task force with the United Kingdom as lead country, to draft elements for compliance mechanisms to be presented to it or to the Meeting of Parties, whichever convened first, for discussion;

(b) Requested the secretariat to provide assistance in contacting experts;

(c) Took note of the need to have in the task force experts with experience in compliance mechanisms under human rights instruments;

(d) Decided to revise paragraphs 37-39 of the work-plan accordingly.

3. Pollution inventories or registers

50. The delegation of the Czech Republic emphasized the importance of pollution registers for implementing the Convention. It reminded the Meeting

of a number of international initiatives concerning pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTR) from which the Aarhus process could benefit. It also offered to lead a task force. Its goal should be to review experience under international processes and national systems of the Signatories, to prepare on that basis a programme of work for developing an appropriate instrument, for example guidelines, to implement article 5, paragraph 9, of the Convention and to prepare a basis for a harmonized PRTR system reflecting already existing PRTR systems and those in preparation. Bearing in mind the limited resources that the Czech Republic could allocate for the purpose, it indicated that it would welcome cooperation with and support from other countries.

51. The delegation of France indicated that it had some experience in pollution registers and offered to share it. It suggested that it would be too early to establish a task force but at this stage experience could be shared without one.

52. The delegations of Austria, Belgium, Hungary, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Switzerland, and the NGOs Coalition considered it important to establish a task force to address the issue of pollution inventories or registers.

53. The delegations of Germany and Italy offered financial support for the task force. REC also indicated that it could make a substantive contribution.

54. The delegation of Germany suggested restricting the task force's mandate to sharing information on experience with applying article 5, paragraph 9, of the Convention.

55. The delegation of Belgium suggested changing paragraph 42 of the work-plan by replacing the word "implementing" by "in the area covered by".

56. The following delegations expressed interest in participating in the task force on pollution registers led by the Czech Republic: Austria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Ukraine, REC and the NGOs Coalition. The delegation of the Commission of the European Communities indicated that it would inform the secretariat later if its experts would participate in this task force.

57. Delegations taking part in the discussion:

(a) Proposed that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), UNEP, and the European Environment Agency should be officially invited to participate in the task force;

(b) Suggested that representatives of the private sector should be involved in the task force;

(c) Indicated the need for a standard approach to organizing task forces under UN/ECE conventions.

58. The Meeting:

(a) Decided that all task forces under the Convention should be allowed to propose draft recommendations to be discussed by the Signatories or the Parties;

(b) Decided that representatives of NGOs should be invited to participate in all task forces under the Convention;

(c) Considered that addressing pollution registers was an important issue and agreed that a first step could be to collect relevant experience;

(d) To this end, decided to establish a task force, with the Czech Republic as lead country, to prepare draft recommendations for future work on PRTR, to be presented to the Signatories or the Parties;

(e) Requested the lead country and the secretariat to consider jointly which international organizations should be invited to participate in the task force.

4. Genetically modified organisms

59. The delegation of Denmark introduced the discussion about the issue of genetically modified organisms, on behalf of Mr. V. Koester, Chairman of the Working Group negotiating a biosafety protocol under the global Convention on Biological Diversity. The Meeting was informed that, despite the breakdown in the negotiations, agreement was reached on most of the protocol's provisions and the public participation provisions were not causing any problems. Therefore, the delegation of Denmark recommended the Meeting not to hesitate to take appropriate steps under the Aarhus Convention.

60. The delegation of Germany suggested that the Signatories to the Aarhus Convention should give priority to its entry into force and that new issues should be left to the Parties. Therefore, no task force on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) was needed at this stage.

61. The delegation of France indicated that it had no objection to this particular task force, but was generally reluctant to create too many task forces. It proposed that, instead of establishing a task force, signatory countries should be requested to submit their views about the issue to the secretariat, which would be responsible for presenting these views to the Parties at their first meeting.

62. The delegation of Austria considered it important to address the issue of GMOs under the Aarhus Convention. It suggested requesting countries to submit their views to a task force whose role would be to present them to the

Meeting of the Signatories or the Parties, and offered to lead such a task force.

63. The delegations of Georgia, Lithuania, NGOs Coalition and REC emphasized the importance of addressing the issue, and together with the delegations of Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, Norway, Poland and Switzerland supported the establishment of the task force as proposed by the delegation of Austria.

64. The delegation of Germany suggested a compromise by establishing a task force with a mandate limited to sharing experience.

65. The delegation of the Congress of Regional and Local Authorities of Europe requested that its view also be heard by the task force.

66. The Meeting:

(a) Decided to establish a task force on GMOs and welcomed the delegation of Austria's offer to lead it;

(b) Requested Governments to share their experience and their views on the issue of public participation in controlling releases of GMOs, and to discuss them at the meeting of the task force;

(c) Requested the secretariat to send a letter to Governments and to the Congress of Regional and Local Authorities of Europe to invite them to submit their views by a deadline to be fixed by the secretariat in cooperation with the lead country;

(d) Requested the task force to convene early enough to allow it to report to the Meeting of the Signatories or the Parties, whichever convened first, and to request a decision to be taken whether it should continue its work;

(e) Requested the delegations of Austria and the Czech Republic to assist the secretariat in revising the relevant parts of the work-plan.

VII. OTHER BUSINESS

67. The delegation of Ukraine pointed out that the Convention's implementation would depend very much on the existing conditions, which in countries in transition would require making more efforts than elsewhere. It, therefore, requested the Meeting to address the need for supporting such efforts.

68. The delegation of the NGOs Coalition reiterated its call for task forces to be set up on electronic access to information, public participation in the preparation of programmes, plans, policies and legislation, and access to

justice. It offered to play a leading role, provided some financial support was made available.

69. The delegations of France and Germany considered that there was no need at this stage for additional task forces as proposed by the NGOs Coalition.

70. The delegations of Belgium and Austria suggested that the task force dealing with compliance could also address the issue of access to justice. The delegation of the United Kingdom thought this was too ambitious.

71. The delegation of Austria suggested that the NGOs could prepare a paper on good practices in public participation in the preparation of programmes, plans, policies and legislation.

72. The Meeting:

(a) Decided to call on bilateral donors and international financial institutions to strengthen their support to countries in transition for their activities under the Convention. In particular, they should provide training and technical assistance to administration at all levels, the judiciary, NGOs and the public at large;

(b) Requested NGOs to collect information on good practices in public participation in programmes, plans, policies and legislation, which would be distributed at its second meeting so that it could decide on what should be done next;

(c) Decided to give further consideration to the issue of electronic access to information in the light of the results of the London Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health;

(d) Decided to recommend that the Committee on Environmental Policy should consider holding a workshop on links between the Aarhus Convention and other ECE conventions;

(e) Decided to give its Bureau the mandate to:

- Consider, in the light of available funding, if it was possible to establish a task force on the issue of access to justice;
- To send, via the secretariat, a letter to Governments inquiring whether they would be ready to send experts to such a task force;
- To refer the question of whether such a task force should be set up to the Committee on Environmental Policy;

(f) Took note with appreciation that delegations from the following countries indicated they would provide financial support for the activities under the work-plan:

- Italy (for the task forces on compliance, pollution registers, and GMOs);
- Netherlands (for the task force on compliance, and maybe also for other task forces and trust funds in general, provided the secretariat submitted a formal request);
- Germany (about 15,000 US dollars for the travel costs of experts from countries in transition to take part in task forces on compliance and pollution registers);
- Finland (specific activity to be decided later);
- Norway (specific activity to be decided later);
- United Kingdom (for costs related to the Workshop as envisaged in the work-plan);

(g) Noted also that the delegation of Austria promised to consider making a contribution;

(h) Expressed its gratitude for the contribution already committed by Denmark;

(i) Recommended that further bilateral channels should be developed to support activities under the Convention;

(j) Approved the work-plan, as revised in the light of its decision (see annex below), and noted that it should be seen in the context of the discussion under item 4 of the agenda, in particular in relation to: the need for training, the network of focal points and links between UN/ECE conventions;

(k) Thanked the Government of the Republic of Moldova for organizing the first meeting of the Signatories to the Convention and the Governments of Italy and Austria for their financial support.

73. The Chairman closed the meeting and, on behalf of the participants, thanked the Government of the Republic of Moldova for the excellent arrangements it had made to host the meeting.

Annex

WORK-PLAN

for the Aarhus Convention pending its entry into force

I. GENERAL OBJECTIVES AND MEANS

1. The Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters was adopted and signed at the fourth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" in Århus on 25 June 1998. Thirty-nine countries and the European Community have already signed it.

2. The Convention - more so than traditional environmental conventions - contains obligations on the part of the public authorities towards the public at large. It is also more intersectoral by nature, as it covers all environmental areas, such as water, air, soil, chemicals, biodiversity, human health and living conditions. This Convention lays down more detailed requirements in terms of openness and transparency in the decision-making process and access to all environmental information, and, in this way, its implementation will strengthen both environmental protection and democracy throughout the ECE region.

3. The Convention has attracted attention also outside the ECE region and has a potential for being applied worldwide. It is open for accession to all Member States of the United Nations. In their Resolution (ECE/CEP/43/Add.1/Rev.1), the Ministers invited any State that is a member of the United Nations and/or of other regional commissions to accede to the Convention.

4. To successfully fulfil its roles, the Convention needs to enter into force promptly and be applied properly. This, in turn, will raise its profile within the UN/ECE region and increase its potential global outreach. To this end, the Committee on Environmental Policy agreed, at its fifth session, to set the goal for the Convention to enter into force by the year 2000.

5. Consequently, there is a need to promote the Convention's ratification and to emphasize its implementation pending its entry into force. The overall objective of this effort is to speed up the ratification by individual countries by raising political and public awareness of the Convention, and by providing assistance to Signatories and non-Signatories - in particular countries in transition - in their ratification or accession processes.

6. While focusing the attention on facilitating the entry into force and the implementation of the Convention, due account has to be given also to appropriate preparations for the first meeting of the Parties to the Convention.
7. From the above general objectives, specific working elements and tasks can be derived. They come under two headings: (a) promotion, ratification and implementation of the Convention; and (b) preparations for the Meeting of the Parties.
8. For the Convention to succeed, all actors need to take concerted action: Governments, international organizations and institutions, including donor institutions, the private sector, the media and non-governmental organizations, which all need to be involved in activities under the Convention.
9. To achieve the general objectives and specific tasks envisaged in this work-plan, several different ways of organizing and delivering the work may be needed, for example: workshops, groups of experts or task forces, reports or other publications, press releases, etc. The Convention's website and its Advisory Board will play an important role in this context.
10. The website is part of the UN/ECE website. It was created by the UN/ECE secretariat to inform the general public about the Convention and activities related to it. It will progressively be used to make information about forthcoming events, news and official documents available to the broadest possible audience.
11. The Advisory Board is intended to bring together renowned personalities who have experience or are committed to issues covered by the Convention. The Board consists of experts from governments, international institutions, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions dealing with issues related to access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters. They sit on the Board in their personal capacity. The role of the Board is to assist in promoting the Convention and its principles within and outside the UN/ECE region. The Board is intended to facilitate the early entry into force of the Convention, by providing the necessary support to countries requesting assistance in their efforts to ratify and implement the Convention, and to expand contacts, in particular with international institutions, the NGO community and donors involved in Convention-related activities. It can also be used to facilitate the implementation of the work-plan. The costs of participation of the Advisory Board's members in its activities will be borne by their respective organizations or institutions, unless funding is made available for such

activities to the Trust Fund.

II. PROMOTION, RATIFICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

A. Translations

12. **Objective.** To be ratified and properly implemented, the Convention must be widely known and well understood. This can be ensured only if it is available also in the national languages.

13. **Work to be undertaken.** Translation into the national languages, as the first step towards ratification, should be considered extremely urgent. It should be started immediately if not already done. Some of the countries in transition may require help in this respect. Efforts will be made to ensure that adequate assistance becomes available from different sources. Donors providing support for various Convention-related activities will be strongly encouraged to consider translation into national languages a priority and prerequisite for funding.

14. To facilitate the promotion of the Convention outside the UN/ECE region, the secretariat will make efforts to provide translation into official United Nations languages other than the three official languages of ECE. The Convention has already been translated into Spanish.

15. **Resources.** Translation costs will basically be borne by the respective Governments. Consideration should be given to supporting such activities through bilateral assistance or other financial means. In those countries in transition requesting assistance, translation will be much more cost-effective if done locally and in cooperation with the Government.

16. **Expected outcome.** For the second meeting of the Signatories, all Signatories will have at their disposal the Convention translated into their national languages.

B. Identification of good practice, problems and opportunities and sharing of experience

17. **Objective.** There is a need to promote good practice and identify problems and opportunities related to the implementation of the Convention, in particular in relation to issues for which the Convention describes obligations are described in general terms and countries are required to establish practical arrangements.

18. **Work to be undertaken.** On the basis of the discussion at the first meeting of the Signatories, the secretariat will draft a list of key issues. A workshop will be organized in autumn 1999 in the United Kingdom to discuss one of these - public participation at the local level - and to share experience. The conclusions and recommendations of the workshop will be presented to the Signatories at their second meeting.

19. **Resources.** Preparation and organization of the workshop, including travel costs for representatives of countries in transition, will be borne by the host country.

20. **Expected outcome.** Countries will have an opportunity to share their experience and learn from the experience of others, and thereby be better prepared to implement the Convention.

C. Implementation guide

21. **Objective.** There is a need to assist, in particular national Governments, to understand the requirements of the Convention in the context of the negotiations that preceded it and existing international and national practice.

22. **Work to be undertaken.** Preparation of an implementation guide for the Convention by a group of international lawyers in close cooperation with those actively involved in negotiations, under the supervision of the secretariat.

23. **Resources.** The preparation of such a guide would require at least three professional months, and consultations with the appropriate forums. The estimated cost of the project is at least US\$ 75,000 and will be borne by the Government of Denmark.

24. **Expected outcome.** An official UN/ECE publication which will help promote the Convention and provide assistance to Governments in their efforts to implement it.

D. Inventory of activities and available funding

25. **Objective.** Various Governments, organizations and institutions undertake Convention-related activities and have established funding schemes which go beyond their purely national interests. There is a need to have full information of such activities and funding to facilitate cooperation between all stakeholders, in particular potential beneficiaries and donors, avoid

duplication of efforts and better designate the resources allocated for the purpose.

26. **Work to be undertaken.** On the basis of the discussions and information provided at the first meeting of the Signatories and subsequent submissions from Governments, institutions and organizations, the secretariat will draw up an inventory of such activities and funding, continuously updating it and post it on the Convention's website.

27. **Resources.** No additional costs involved.

28. **Expected outcome.** Easy access to information on the most relevant activities and funding.

E. Bringing together all actors

29. **Objective.** To encourage the sharing of experience, those interested in the experience gained in other countries must be able to contact directly those who are in a position to deliver such information.

30. **Work to be undertaken.** The secretariat will compile the contact details of all persons from Governments, international institutions, non-governmental organizations and others actively involved in implementing the Convention (with their permission), constantly update them and make them available on the Aarhus Convention's website. The Governments may consider using their focal points for Infoterra to this end.

31. **Resources.** No additional costs involved.

32. **Expected outcome.** Easy access to the contact details of those who may be able to provide information.

III. **PREPARATION FOR THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES**

A. Rules of procedure

33. **Objective.** According to article 10, paragraph 2 (h), of the Convention, the Parties shall, at their first meeting, consider and by consensus adopt rules of procedure for their meetings and the meetings of subsidiary bodies, including, according to article 10, paragraph 6, practical arrangements for the admittance procedure and other relevant terms referred to in article 10, paragraphs 4 and 5.

34. **Work to be undertaken.** The secretariat will draw up preliminary draft

rules of procedure, in the light of the experience gained with other ECE environmental conventions. They will be discussed at the second meeting of the Signatories with a view to facilitating their adoption by consensus at the first meeting of the Parties.

35. **Resources.** The secretariat will draw up the preliminary draft rules. It is envisaged that no additional resources will be needed.

36. **Expected outcome.** At their first meeting, the Parties will have before them draft rules of procedure.

B. Compliance mechanism

37. **Objective.** According to article 15 of the Convention, the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention shall establish, on a consensus basis, optional arrangements of a non-confrontational, non-judicial and consultative nature for reviewing compliance with the provisions of the Convention.

38. **Work to be undertaken.** On the basis of the discussion at the first meeting of the Signatories, a Task Force was established with the United Kingdom as lead country to prepare draft elements for possible compliance mechanisms.

39. **Resources.** It may be necessary to cover the travel costs of some experts from countries in transition and NGOs.

40. **Expected outcome.** Draft elements to facilitate the discussion at the second meeting of the Signatories (or the first meeting of the Parties, if that takes place first).

C. Pollution inventories or registers

41. **Objective.** Article 10, paragraph 2 (I), of the Convention requires the Parties, at their first meeting, to review their experience in implementing the provisions of article 5, paragraph 9, and consider what steps are necessary to develop further the system referred to in that paragraph, taking into account international processes and developments, including the elaboration of an appropriate instrument concerning pollution release and transfer registers or inventories which could be annexed to the Convention.

42. **Work to be undertaken.** On the basis of the discussion at the first meeting of the Signatories, a Task Force was established, with the Czech

Republic as lead country, to prepare a report summarizing the experience in the area covered by the provisions of article 5, paragraph 9, as well as relevant international processes and developments, and make recommendations for further action.

43. **Resources.** It may be necessary to cover the travel costs of some experts from countries in transition and NGOs.

44. **Expected outcome.** A report with recommendations to be presented to the Signatories at their second meeting to the Parties at their first meeting, if that takes place first.

D. Genetically modified organisms

45. **Objective.** The Ministers, in their Resolution, requested the Parties to the Convention, at their first meeting to further develop, by means of inter alia more precise provisions, the application of the Convention to deliberate releases of genetically modified organisms into the environment, taking into account the work done under the Convention on Biological Diversity to develop a protocol on biosafety.

46. **Work to be undertaken.** On the basis of the discussion at the first meeting of the Signatories, a Task Force, with Austria as lead country, was established to prepare a report summarizing the experience in implementing the provisions of article 6, paragraph 11, as well as relevant international processes and developments, and make recommendations for further action.

47. **Resources.** It may be necessary to cover the travel costs of some experts from countries in transition and NGOs.

48. **Expected outcome.** Report with recommendations presented to the Signatories at their second meeting (or to the Parties at their first meeting, if that takes place first).

E. Access to justice

49. The Bureau will consider, in the light of the funding available, the possibility of requesting the Committee on Environmental Policy to decide whether to establish a task force on access to justice.

F. Links with other conventions

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Annex

50. The Committee will be requested to consider holding a workshop on links between the Aarhus Convention and other conventions.