

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

**MESSAGE TO SECOND MEETING OF THE PARTIES
TO THE AARHUS CONVENTION ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION,
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE
IN ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS**

To be delivered by the Executive Secretary of UNECE, Ms. Brigita Schmögnerová

Almaty, 27 May 2005

It gives me great pleasure to send my greetings to all the participants in this second meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention.

The Convention is one of the most far-reaching international treaties in the field of environmental democracy. Its core principles – the right to information, the right to participate and the right to seek access to justice – empower citizens to hold governments accountable and to play a greater role in promoting more sustainable forms of development.

This will be the first meeting at which you, the Parties to the Convention, will review implementation of this groundbreaking instrument, based on national reports and the first findings of the Compliance Committee. Both the compliance and reporting mechanisms reflect the participatory spirit of the Convention, by which any member of the public concerned about a Party's compliance with provisions of the Convention can trigger a formal review process, and by which Parties reporting on implementation are required to do so through a transparent, consultative process involving the public.

Thus far, implementation reports show the many challenges ahead but also reveal just how much has been done. Across Europe and in Central Asia, countries have been introducing new laws or amending existing ones to bring them into line with the Convention. And new institutions, such as the 'Aarhus Centres' established in several countries, have been created to realize its goals.

While the UNECE region has taken the lead in establishing this legal framework, the values that animate the Aarhus Convention apply everywhere. It is encouraging to know that you will be discussing ways of making the Convention more accessible to States outside the ECE region, and sharing with other regions the experiences that you have acquired with the Convention.

Over the long term, the success of the Convention will depend not only on the political will of governments but also on the readiness of the public to exercise the rights that the Convention seeks to guarantee. I welcome the active participation of civil society organizations in the Aarhus processes, including in this meeting. Your involvement will ensure that the Convention remains a living, evolving instrument. You may not always be happy with the decisions that are taken -- that is normal in an open, multistakeholder forum -- but your criticisms and contributions are an essential part of a healthy process.

In closing, I call on all States that are not yet Party to the Aarhus Convention, in particular those from the ECE region, to consider acceding to this important treaty. And I look forward to working with all of you towards its full and speedy implementation. Please accept my best wishes for a successful session.