

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT THE AARHUS CONVENTION

The following are extracts from statements made by representatives of various governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. Full copies of the statements are available in a compendium from the secretariat or can be found on the Convention web site at www.unece.org/env/pp from 30 October 2001.

“The Aarhus Convention is the most ambitious venture in environmental democracy undertaken under the auspices of the United Nations. Its adoption was a remarkable step forward in the development of international law. ... The firm commitment to [the Convention's] principles of ... States in Eastern Europe and Central Asia ... clearly demonstrates that environmental rights are not a luxury reserved for rich countries... We must use next year's World Summit on Sustainable Development to strengthen our commitment to environmental rights - not only in Europe but throughout the world.”

Kofi Annan, Secretary-General, United Nations

“The Convention is a remarkable achievement not only in terms of protection of the environment, but also in terms of the promotion and protection of human rights. ... The Convention touches on the fundamental issues of democracy and the rights of people to protect their well-being and that of their children. ... It is truly a trailblazer. In this regard, the entry into force we are celebrating today is a key signpost for the future of human rights and the environment in all parts of the world.”

***Mary Robinson,
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights***

“I wish to congratulate the Economic Commission for Europe for the entry into force today of the Aarhus Convention, the first legally binding instrument for access to information, public participation in decision-making and justice in environmental matters. Such an achievement is of global significance... Today is an important landmark for the environment. The Convention gives us a golden opportunity to pursue our environmental endeavours from the right approach.”

***Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director,
United Nations Environment Programme***

“As European Environment Commissioner, I .. intend to ensure that the principles of the Aarhus Convention are applied, in their words and in their spirit, in the daily practice within the Community. This will take time and will require a change in behaviour of many citizens and administrations, local authorities and environmental organizations. However, if our European society is an open society and wishes to remain one, we need to make the Aarhus principles part of our daily environmental policy.”

***Margot Wallström, European Commissioner
for the Environment, European Commission***

“The Aarhus Convention ...is the inspiration for the further development of the democratic process in the countries with economies in transition.” [unofficial translation]

**Vardan Aivazyan, Minister of the Environment,
Republic of Armenia**

“On behalf of the Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Water, I would like to congratulate you with the entry into force of Aarhus Convention. We consider it to be great success for the environmental protection as well as for the development of the democratic processes.”

**Nelly Ilieva, Focal point for Aarhus Convention,
Ministry of Environment and Water, Bulgaria**

“The entry into force of the Aarhus Convention is a historical landmark and an unprecedented example of the international community’s successful quest towards more effective protection of the environment ... May I congratulate those few but brave who had the vision and courage to launch and make this unique piece of international environmental legislation operative.”

**Bozo Kovacevic, Minister of Environmental Protection
and Physical Planning, Croatia**

“I would like to express my deep appreciation for the efforts that have culminated in the entering into force of the Aarhus Convention ... it is the first time that environment is so closely linked to human rights.”

**Costas Themistocleous, Minister of Agriculture,
Natural Resources and Environment, Cyprus**

“The Aarhus Convention .. opens the door to a new model of partnership, a new style of communication among all parts of civic society in our countries...[It] has served in our country as a great stimulation to have our environmental legislation even more democratic.”

Milos Kuzvart, Minister of the Environment, Czech Republic

“Denmark finds the need for a global framework for strengthening citizens’ environmental rights more important than ever in our search for sustainable development.”

**Svend Auken, Minister of Environment
and Energy, Denmark**

“The date of the entry into force of the Aarhus Convention marks a special day in the development of international environmental law... The provisions on access to information, public participation and access to justice will further the legitimacy and transparency of environmental decision-making in the ECE region.”

Satu Hassi, Minister of the Environment, Finland

“With the entry into force of the Aarhus Convention, the UNECE set new standards for the transparency of administrative decisions and public participation in the field of environmental protection. ...This Convention ensures that citizens can make more effective use of their democratic rights of participation in the field of environmental protection.”

**Jürgen Trittin, Federal Minister for the Environment,
Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Germany**

“At the birth of the Convention, a lot of you may have agreed with us thinking that the economically, socially and politically most developed European countries would be the first ones to ratify it. But it is not the case. Several countries from among the 16 ones to ratify it first are just about to rebuild their economic and political systems. I am convinced that the Aarhus Convention provides a lot of support for them from a political and economic point of view.”

Dr. Béla Turi-Kovács, Minister of the Environment, Hungary

“The coming into force of the Aarhus Convention demonstrates the commitment of the international community to involving people in decisions that affect their daily lives. I congratulate the UNECE on reaching this significant milestone.”

Noel Dempsey TD, Minister of the Environment, Ireland

“The Aarhus Convention is the world’s most progressive instrument promoting the rights of people to play an active part in the creation of a more environmentally sustainable society. Italy will continue to promote the Convention as a leading model ... in the preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development that will take place in Johannesburg, South Africa, September 2002.”

Altero Matteoli, Minister of the Environment, Italy

“Sustainable development is impossible without ensuring personal freedom and the right to have access to reliable environmental information. Therefore, we can regard the signing and ratification of the Aarhus Convention by European and NIS countries, and its entry into force, as the acknowledgement of their adherence and commitment to the principles of democracy and publicity.”

Andar Shukputov, Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, Kazakhstan

“Lithuania ... considers the Convention the most far-reaching instrument promoting democracy, strengthening citizens’ environmental rights and improving co-operation between members of the public and governmental institutions. Furthermore, the Convention opens up new possibilities to all people who feel responsible for and want to take an active part in the protection of environment.”

Arunas Kundrotas, Minister of the Environment, Lithuania

“I hope that the Convention will serve as an inspiration, even beyond Europe and in other domains than the environment. We are working hard for its ratification, and until it is ratified, we will conduct ourselves as if it were already in force.”

Jan Pronk, Minister of Housing and Spatial Planning, The Netherlands

“The Aarhus Convention constitutes a major achievement in international environmental law. It represents a re-orientation of this field of law in the sense that it focuses on the role of individuals and NGOs, and the contribution they can make in our common effort to achieve sustainable development. Moreover, the Aarhus Convention confirms the important link that exists between protection of human rights and protection of the environment.”

Børge Brende, Minister of the Environment, Norway

“I would like to congratulate the Secretariat of the Aarhus Convention and all contracting Parties with entering into force of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. Moldova was the first country that has ratified this convention and we are proud that other countries followed our example.”

Gheorghe Duca, Minister for Ecology, Construction and Territorial Development, Republic of Moldova

“I appreciate the UN/ECE special support for the promotion of the Convention principles and I would like to express my confidence for an intensified sustainable development of the environmental factors, for a favourable framework of free access to information and for a real partnership in order to conserve this common inestimable heritage.”

Aurel Constantin ILIE, Minister of Waters and Environmental Protection, Romania

“The Aarhus Convention marks a significant shift towards an environmentally responsible society... The Slovak Republic is confident that by implementing the Aarhus Convention, Europe has again confirmed the values of democracy and human rights and gives hope of sustainable development for the whole world.”

Prof. Laszló Miklós, Minister of the Environment, Slovak Republic

“Time and implementation experience will show the pioneering far-sighted dimension of this Convention ... I am aware that a lot of efforts in awareness-raising of different target groups will be needed to actually live the spirit of the Aarhus Convention... I hope that Slovenia will join the Aarhus Club very soon.”

Janez Kopac, Minister of the Environment and Spatial Planning, Slovenia

“The entry into force of the Convention ... will help to co-ordinate the efforts of many countries in our geographical region to improve environmental policy and action. The Spanish Government expects to ratify the Aarhus Convention during the second half of 2002.” [unofficial translation]

D. Jaume Matas i Palou, Minister of the Environment, Spain

“The Aarhus Convention, which is the result of ambitious efforts for a long period of time, is a historical step. The Convention gives hope for the future when it comes to involving the citizens in environmental matters... I am convinced that future generations will remember what happened on 30 October 2001!”

Kjell Larsson, Minister of the Environment, Sweden

“Our country was among the first to sign and ratify the Convention, thus expressing its attitude about the importance and the priority status of this Convention for the Republic of Macedonia. The Convention principles enable strong stimulus for building a citizenship-democratic concept in the domain of environment management and protection ... there is no democracy without active public, just as there could not be active public without democracy.”

***Vladimir Dzabirski
Minister of Environment and Physical Planning
The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia***

“The day that the Aarhus Convention enters into force is a great day for the environment. But it is also a great day for democracy – not just representative democracy, but a new and more participatory form of democracy in which the crucial role of many social actors is recognized.”

Serhii Kurykin, Minister of the Environment, Ukraine

“It is clear that the Convention is an important instrument which does as much for human rights as it does for creating a framework for achieving sustainable development. It deserves our strong support. ... The real challenge though is to avoid a gap between the words of the Convention and the day-to-day practice on the ground. To provide insurance against this, I believe that we need an effective compliance mechanism for the Convention.”

***Michael Meacher, Minister of State for the Environment,
United Kingdom***

“.. the Convention stimulates a great interest for state and public organizations of the Republic of Uzbekistan... Congratulations to the Parties to the Convention and to the public with the new perspectives for the environmental protection.” [unofficial translation]

***Haliulla Sherimbetov, Chairman, State Committee
for Environment, Uzbekistan***

“I am glad that Aarhus Convention is entering into force. Although FR Yugoslavia did not sign Convention and has not acceded to it, the new environmental policy of Serbia is starting to integrate Aarhus "thinking" in the agenda for building up a new legal system for environmental and natural resources protection... We expect that the minimum standards introduced by the Aarhus Convention will be accepted in region in general.”

***Andjelka Mihajlov, Director General for Environmental Protection,
Ministry for Health and Environmental Protection of Serbia,
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia***

“...this is a major step towards decision-making and relevant action for sustainable development... I wish you a successful celebration ceremony and mainly an efficient implementation thereafter for such an important tool for sustainable development”

***Arab Hoballah, Deputy Coordinator,
UNEP/Mediterranean Action Plan, Athens***

“The Convention has created an indelible link between human rights and the right to environmentally related information, public participation and access to justice. This makes it the first multilateral environmental agreement to impose obligations on its Parties *vis-à-vis* their own citizens, which gives it even greater significance.”

The World Conservation Union – IUCN

“The adoption of the Convention ... was a historical achievement demonstrating the high priority the countries of the UN ECE region give to promotion of transparency and participatory approach to environmental decision-making. The very short time within which the Convention enters into force indicates the historic importance of its content and the novelty of the principles embedded in it.

Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC)

“The entry into force of the Aarhus Convention ... is a moment of satisfaction for environmental organisations in the entire UN-ECE region.... While we regretted the weaknesses in the final result, we have become strong advocates of the Convention. We campaign for its ratification and accession in the entire pan-European region, as well as in regional and international bodies.... I strongly feel that with the UN-ECE and the Environment Ministries we are together working on an instrument that is indispensable for sustainable development and participatory democracy, and example for the rest of the world.”

***John Hontelez, Secretary General,
European Environmental Bureau***

“The Aarhus Convention is the most significant international achievement in the field of environmental rights of recent years and its entry into force is a milestone to be celebrated... It is worth recalling that the Aarhus Convention is the result of an extraordinary, and extraordinarily successful, experiment in multilateral cooperation between governments and environmental organisations. This experiment deserves to be replicated in other international environmental negotiations.”

***Ralph Hallo, President of the EEB and
Coordinator of the International Program,
Stichting Natuur en Milieu, the Netherlands***

“Congratulations on this important day - both to the UNECE and its staff, and to all those countries which have ratified or acceded to the Convention! This is a great boost for everyone working for citizens’ environmental rights, including NGOs. We are delighted that seventeen countries are now Parties. Let’s celebrate again when ALL countries in the UNECE region have joined the Aarhus Club!”

Mary Taylor, Public Participation Coordinator, European ECO Forum

“.. the Aarhus Convention is a vital statement of environmental democracy and human rights, .. it points the way towards government that is more open, participatory, and accountable to all citizens and to decision-making that is more fair, legitimate, and sustainable... Now, as it enters force, the Convention has shifted the debate from *whether* we should guarantee these rights of access to information, public participation, and justice in environmental decision-making to *how* we should make these rights available to all, and has suggested a way for us to implement these rights.

***Access Initiative core group: World Resources Institute (USA),
Thailand Environment Institute (Thailand), Environmental Management
and Law Association (Hungary) and Corporación Participa (Chile)***

“Aarhus has been a call for, an impetus, and a guide for building public participation in our region and for providing an example to the world. We are pleased to have been a part of this monumentally important process and we look forward to the future as Aarhus generates an even more strongly felt impact.”

***Sándor Fülöp and Gyula Bandi,
Environmental Management and Law Association, Hungary***

“Members of IHEAL – the environment and health information and communication technologies network created in support of implementation of the Aarhus Convention – join in congratulating the UN ECE Secretariat on their tremendous achievement.”

Interactive Health Ecology Access Links (IHEAL)

“I want to send you my congratulations on this historical step. We in the International Society of Doctors for the Environment live mostly in the medical community where the tradition of secrecy is still too important. We will strive to contribute to more transparency also from the health sector.”

***Gaudenz Silberschmidt, Executive Director,
International Society of Doctors for the Environment***

“... the most unconventional convention ...”

Nickolai Denisov, Programme Manager, UNEP/GRID-Arendal, Norway