

Statement by Latvia on Maastricht Declaration
Joint High-level Segment, 2 July 2014, Agenda item 4

Madam Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am most honoured to participate in this high-level segment of the Aarhus Convention and its PRTR Protocol meetings and to discuss our achievements and challenges under both the international instruments. Let me also use this opportunity to thank the organizers and hosts for this remarkable event.

1. Latvia welcomes the Maastricht Declaration. In our view the declaration delivers a focused message on transparency which is an essential component of environmental democracy. Indeed, this is an appropriate forum for adopting such a notable declaration, considering that the Convention together with its Protocol are leading international instruments on environmental democracy.

2. We believe that transparency, environmental democracy and environmental governance may lead to real improvement in the living conditions of the public today as well as in the future.

3. However, we must admit that although in most countries of the UNECE region the public has been granted broad rights in the environmental domain, ensuring true environmental democracy remains a challenge. Therefore we recognize that the efficiency of environmental governance should be permanently improved both at the national and international level.

4. Today's public authorities cannot afford being indifferent to environmental democracy. Decades ago information on environmental problems used to pop up in newspaper headlines. Even if noticed, they were often forgotten soon afterwards. However, in the era of modern communication tools, such as smartphones and Internet-based social networks, the public can easily access and exchange information and react accordingly without delay. We are aware of this development, and it requires adequate attention of the public authorities responsible for disseminating environmental information. If used properly by

authorities in charge, modern communication tools may significantly contribute to transparency and thus enhance environmental democracy.

5. Latvia supports the idea of spreading the good news of the Aarhus Convention and its PRTR Protocol around the world. We are convinced that broad acceptance of the Aarhus Convention principles will improve cooperation among governments, as environmental issues, including environmental damage, do not recognize political borders. In this respect transparency is crucial for ensuring international peace and security.

6. Latvia is looking forward to presiding over the Council of the European Union during the first semester of 2015. The Presidency term will offer us additional opportunities and responsibility in the domain of environmental governance, including transparency. Therefore I am sure that the Presidency agenda is going to contain a strong element of environmental issues.

7. Finally, recalling the global commitment to sustainable development expressed in the outcome document “The Future We Want” adopted at the Rio+20 Conference, we really have an opportunity to use the principles of the Aarhus Convention for promoting transparency and good environmental governance. This requires making an effort at the national, European Union and international level. I believe that together we can advance towards true environmental democracy!

Ladies, gentlemen, thank you for your attention!