

Your excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues, friends,

The joint statement by Ecoforum of NGOs of Kazakhstan, Crude Accountability (USA), Ecohome and Green Network from Belarus concerns effective implementation of and compliance with article 3, para. 8, of the Convention, i.e. the issue of harassment, persecution and penalization of environmental defenders. As of today, it was supported by 24 recipients of the Goldman Prize. It is just for a few days.

The implementation of the Convention for almost 16 years as well as the implementation of principle 10 of the Rio Declaration prove the key role of environmental NGOs and activists in these processes. They trigger mechanisms of international environmental law and sustainable development, engage the general public in activities on nature protection, promotion of sustainable lifestyle and application of modern environmental standards. It is very likely that without them, sustainable development will remain just a great wish on a piece of paper.

In April of this year we initiated the preparation of a report on the harassment of environmental defenders in the former Soviet Union and the USA. Our report provides numerous examples of the increasing pressure on environmental defenders. Environmental protection has become a dangerous profession in many countries; some countries are already “white spots” on the map of environmental activism. This is threatening not only the implementation of the Convention but, in essence, any possibilities to achieve sustainable development.

We call participants of the MOP to draw attention to the situation with harassment of environmental defenders and to work to improve it. We appreciate the adoption by the Compliance Committee of the findings and recommendations on Belarus concerning non-compliance with article 3, para. 8, of the Convention. We consider that the compliance mechanism should be very open for review of cases on harassment of environmental NGOs and activists. We call on the Secretariat to pay special attention to identification of such information for the review within the existing or new mechanisms of the Convention.

We strongly support the creation of special body responsible for quick reaction in cases of persecution, and request consideration of the creation of such a body at the next Meeting of the Parties. There are critical cases for which existing procedures and mechanisms do not provide adequate protection for activists and a several-year delay could have tragic consequences.

The time has arrived for the Parties and the Convention bodies to pay attention not just to improvements in access to information, public participation and access to justice, but also to the possibilities for NGOs and citizens to enjoy their environmental rights without fear! Repression of environmental defenders creates a situation in which, without stronger protections in the Convention, implementation of basic provisions of the Convention is impossible.

Yesterday we raised the same issue at the annual OSCE Human Dimension Implementing meeting because we need urgent action to protect environmental defenders! We will keep doing so, what we can do... because we need urgent action from you and other international organizations!

*Supported by the following Goldman Prize recipients:*

- 1. Kaisha Atakhanova, Kazakhstan*
- 2. Olga Speranskaya, Russia*
- 3. Svyatoslav Zabelin, Russia*
- 4. Maria Gunnoe, USA*
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