

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention)

*Item 4 of the Agenda
Budva Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Our Sustainable Future
Timing: Thursday, 14 September 3.30 – 4.45 p.m.*

Mr. Chairman, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Lithuania welcomes the commitment of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention to adopt the Budva declaration. It reaffirms the strong determination of the Aarhus community to promote environmental democracy and supports the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Public participation, access to information and accountability are key principles of the global environmental and climate-related agreements that provide one dimension of the overarching framework for sustainable development.

The Aarhus Convention is an important instrument that allows society to protect their right to live in the clean and healthy environment and ensures possibility to actively participate in the decision making process. Inclusive societies, access to justice, effective and accountable institutions at all levels are essential in order to ensure successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Government of Lithuania places great importance on partnership with civil society to promote the implementation the 2030 Agenda. An evaluation of national policy's conformity with the SDGs, discussions on national priorities was conducted together with representatives from the NGOs and other social partners.

The availability of high-quality and timely data is vital for evidence-based decision-making and to ensure accountability for implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Therefore we have already started sustainable development data collection and analysis. More than 50 percent of sustainable development indicators have already been made publicly available in Lithuania.

The voices of the people must be taken into account when countries establish priorities, targets and indicators for the SDGs at the national level. Continued effective participation of society is important in translating the sustainable development agenda into concrete national actions, as well as in reviews at national and global levels. However, there still remain significant challenges and many things still have to be done in order to ensure effective implementation of the sustainable development goals.

The starting point should be unconditional fulfilment of all obligations under the Aarhus Convention by the Governments, despite the fact that those obligations may cause inconvenience to decision making.

We note with regret the cases of constant violations of the rights of public concerned and environmental activists by the countries that acknowledged the legally binding status of the Aarhus Convention. A formalistic approach towards the rights of the public at home and in the neighbourhood goes against the word and spirit of the Aarhus Convention. We invite all the Parties, especially those in non-compliance to the Convention, to respect the principles of transparency, openness and inclusiveness in environmental decision-making. Particularly in making decisions on such important issues as nuclear energy projects.

Cases when a Party to the Aarhus Convention harass, penalize and persecute environmental activists for their involvement are incompatible with the guiding principles of democratic societies and should be eradicated.

Fundamental challenges can be solved and environmentally sound decision making can be ensured, only if we make every possible effort to meet the requirements of our international commitments, especially to respect basic human rights.

I believe, that concerns and encouragements, expressed in the Budva declaration, will be heard and appropriate measures will be taken. That is the only way forward in order to ensure health and well-being of present and future generations. This is

especially so in the cases of nuclear energy projects, as they may have devastating transboundary effects.