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Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

Working Group of the Parties**Eighth meeting**

Geneva, 16-18 December 2020

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda**Draft operating procedures to facilitate remote participation and decision-making in eighth meeting of the Protocol's Working Group of the Parties due to extraordinary circumstances*****Prepared by the Bureau***Summary*

In the light of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, delegations, the Chair and the secretariat have become aware of challenges in organizing intergovernmental meetings under extraordinary circumstances. Infection control measures and travel restrictions prevent or limit Parties from physically participating in meetings. From 2 to 29 November 2020, only in-person meetings of five participants are allowed at the premises of the United Nations Office at Geneva. It is currently unclear whether this measure will be lifted after 29 November. In response to this, the Bureau held a meeting on 19 November 2020 (virtual) and prepared the procedures outlined in the present note in order to facilitate participation and decision-making in the eighth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 16–18 December 2020) under COVID-19 measures and restrictions.

The proposed procedures were prepared taking into consideration: relevant established practice and procedures under the Protocol; consultations held with the Office of Legal Affairs; and experiences of other United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

* The present document was submitted late owing to changes in the rules governing the holding of meetings at the United Nations Office at Geneva made in the light of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic-related measures introduced after the standard publication date.



multilateral environmental agreements in taking decisions remotely due to the extraordinary circumstances related to the pandemic.

Parties are invited to communicate any comments they may have on the proposed procedures to the secretariat as soon as possible and by 1 December 2020 (via email to public.participation@un.org). This will enable the Chair to hold any required consultations prior to approval of the procedures at the beginning of the meeting.

I. Introduction

1. The purpose of the proposed procedures presented in the note is to facilitate remote participation and decision-making at the eighth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties in the current extraordinary circumstances.
2. Upon consideration of the proposed procedures by the Bureau, the Bureau agreed that they should be circulated to Parties and stakeholders, with a recommendation that these be approved at the opening of the meeting.
3. “Remote participation and decision-making” means participation and decision-making in meetings through an Internet connection to the virtual meeting platform, whereby representatives can remotely hear other participants and address the meetings; “Meeting with remote participation” means a hybrid meeting, with the option of in-person or remote participation, or a virtual meeting;¹

II. Guiding principles

4. The procedures outlined in the present note are limited to the eighth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties only owing to the current extraordinary circumstances linked to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The procedures outlined in the present note shall supplement the Rules of procedure adopted by the Protocol’s Meeting of the Parties² to ensure that Parties retain the same rights, privileges and protections afforded to them in meetings with only in-person participation.
5. The Rules of procedure adopted by the Meeting of the Parties shall continue to apply in full and take precedence over any procedures contained in the present document.
6. Parties should make use of the “advance circulation procedure” provided for in paragraph 14 below to ensure that all efforts are pursued to achieve a consensus at the meeting with remote participation and decision-making.

III. Registration for remote participants

7. All participants in meetings with remote participation shall pre-register through a form sent to them by the secretariat and, in the case of hybrid meetings, therein indicate their intent to participate either remotely or in-person. The email address provided in the registration form will be that used by the secretariat for communications related to meetings in advance of and during meetings.
8. The secretariat shall communicate information on remote participation in advance of the meeting, including logistical and practical information on the means of connecting to the virtual platform and remotely hearing other participants and addressing the meetings, to all pre-registered representatives.
9. All pre-registered participants intending to participate remotely should test their audio and video connections in advance of meetings in accordance with the instructions sent by the secretariat, to ensure that they are able to participate remotely.

IV. Conduct of business for determining a quorum with remote participation

10. In accordance with rule 26, the presence of a majority of the Parties shall be required for any decision to be taken. For the eighth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties, the presence shall be established through both in-person and remote participation.

¹ Including a meeting where the Chair and the secretariat participate in-person, possibly in addition to one or both Vice-Chairs.

² See ECE/MP.PRTR/2010/2/Add.1, decision I/1.

11. For Parties represented through remote participation, the Chair shall establish Party presence through the Party representatives' Internet connection to the virtual meeting platform at the beginning of the meeting and through a roll call to check attendance through an audio and video connection prior to taking the decisions at the end of the meeting.

12. Representatives of the Parties shall ensure that their Internet connection to the virtual meeting platform is secure and stable throughout the meeting.

13. Where a quorum has not been secured or there is a connection failure on the part of the virtual platform provider, the secretariat or the Chair, the meeting may, depending on the decision of the Chair, be suspended until an Internet connection to the virtual platform of the meeting is re-established for participants facing connection difficulties. The secretariat may communicate between the Chair and remote participants through their pre-registered email addresses on matters regarding connection failure.

V. Decision-making in the meeting with remote participation

14. In accordance with rule 35, every effort shall be made to reach the decisions by consensus. For this meeting, efforts should comprise the following "advance circulation procedure", of which Parties should make use in advance of meetings:

(a) Parties shall consider the circulated documents that are subject to decision-making (with all such documents having already been made available to Parties and stakeholders well in advance through the meeting's web page) and communicate clearly any proposed revisions, using track changes and/or comments, by email to the secretariat as soon as possible, but at least two weeks in advance of the meeting. Interested stakeholders may also wish to submit comments by the deadline set;

(b) If no proposed revisions or comments are made by Parties regarding the draft documents circulated for adoption up to two weeks in advance of the meeting, it shall be expected that consensus will be reached on the respective documents during meetings and that these documents will be approved without significant changes;

(c) Following receipt of proposed revisions and/or comments, the Chair, in consultation with the Vice-Chairs and with the support of the secretariat, may arrange for informal discussions with Parties and stakeholders in advance of meetings, with a view to better understanding the proposed revisions and/or comments received and to reaching a consensus. Parties and stakeholders may, during this period, modify and/or withdraw any of the proposed revisions and/or comments made;

(d) All documents circulated for decision-making or, in cases where revisions have been proposed, their respective circulated updated versions, will be reviewed and open for deliberation during the meeting. If no proposed revisions or comments are made by Parties while the Working Group is reviewing documents during the meeting, the Chair shall communicate that any respective documents or updated versions are adopted by consensus.

15. The Chair, in consultation with the Vice-Chairs and the secretariat, may invite Parties or stakeholders to participate in-person and/or remotely in informal side meetings held on the margins of the meeting with the intention of reaching a consensus, if so required in view of the proposed revisions or comments received. Use of this option will depend on the availability of additional meeting space (virtual and/or physical) and interpretation time.

16. The outcomes and decisions of the meeting will be adopted at the end of the meeting as per established practice. To facilitate their consideration, the Chair, with the support of the secretariat, will make draft outcomes of different sessions available gradually through the meeting's web page during the meeting (at breaks and in the evenings).