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

Working Group of the Parties

Seventeenth meeting

Geneva, 26–28 February 2014

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda

Substantive issues: access to information

Draft decision on access to information

Prepared by the Bureau

Summary

The present document sets out a draft decision on access to information prepared by the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. In view of its mandate to “make such proposals and recommendations to the Meeting of the Parties as it considers necessary for the achievement of the purposes of the Convention” (ECE/MP.PP/2/Add.15, para. 2 (d)), at its sixteenth meeting (Geneva, 19–21 June 2013), the Working Group requested the Bureau to prepare a draft decision on promoting access to information (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2013/2, para. 11) for its consideration, revision and approval and subsequent submission to the Meeting of the Parties for consideration at its fifth session (Maastricht, the Netherlands, 30 June–2 July 2014).

The draft decision was prepared by the Bureau on the basis of decision IV/1 on the same subject, the outcome of the work undertaken by the Task Force on Access to Information in the current intersessional period and the note by the Chair of the Task Force on Access to Information (AC/WGP-16/Inf.1) submitted to the the sixteenth meeting of the Working Group. The document was subsequently distributed to Parties and stakeholders for consultation.¹ The Bureau considered the comments received and prepared the present, revised version of the document for further consideration and approval by the Working Group at its seventeenth meeting.

¹ The comments received are available online at <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/aarhus/wgp17.html> (Statements and comments).

The Meeting of the Parties,

Recalling the provisions of articles 4 and 5 of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention),

Further recalling its decisions I/6, II/3 and III/2 on electronic information tools and the clearinghouse mechanism and decision IV/1 on access to information, as well the relevant objectives of the Strategic Plan for 2015–2020 as adopted through decision V/... and the relevant sections of the Work Programme for 2015–2017 as adopted through decision V/...,

Recognizing the need to further the implementation of the first pillar of the Convention (articles 4 and 5) so as to provide effective public access to environmental information and actively disseminate it to the public, including through electronic information tools,

Underlining the importance of the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy as an effective global mechanism to share knowledge and practices related to principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development,

Having reviewed the reports of the Task Force on Access to Information (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/...),

1. *Notes with appreciation* the work undertaken by the Task Force on Access to Information and expresses its gratitude to the Republic of Moldova for its leadership of the Task Force;

2. *Welcomes* initiatives by Parties, Signatories and other stakeholders to improve public accessibility of environmental information, including through electronic information tools and e-government² and open government data³ initiatives, which promote effective implementation of articles 4 and 5 of the Convention;

3. *Invites* Parties, Signatories and, where in a position to do so, other stakeholders to continue strengthening implementation of the information pillar of the Convention at the national level and to make funds available for this purpose as far as possible;

4. *Calls* on Parties, Signatories, organizations and other stakeholders to continue contributing resources to the Aarhus Clearinghouse and online databases and welcomes the further development of the Aarhus Clearinghouse and other electronic tools under the Convention;

5. *Also calls* on Parties, Signatories, organizations and other stakeholders to further application of the recommendations in decision II/3 to promote the wider use of electronic information tools as an effective instrument for putting into practice the Convention's provisions, including through public-private partnerships,⁴ and to contribute to the Aarhus Clearinghouse and online databases;

² E-government initiatives encompass activities of the public authorities to deploy information and communication technologies for improving knowledge and information in the service of the public.

³ Open government data initiatives encompass activities to make information or data produced or commissioned by governments available for everyone to access, reuse and redistribute without any restrictions.

⁴ A public-private partnership is a scheme that involves cooperation between the public and the private sector aiming at financing, designing, implementing and operating public sector infrastructure and services supporting the implementation of the Convention.

6. *Stresses* the important role of Aarhus Centres, the media, public libraries and other information sites in facilitating public access to environmental information;

7. *Decides* to extend in time the mandate of the Task Force on Access to Information, under the authority of the Working Group of the Parties to the Convention, to carry out work in cooperation with other international forums, taking into consideration the relevant activities being undertaken by Parties, Signatories and other stakeholders;

8. *Welcomes* the offer of [the Republic of Moldova] to [continue to] lead the Task Force on Access to Information;

9. *Requests* the Task Force on Access to Information, subject to the availability of resources, to:

(a) Promote the exchange of information, experiences, challenges and good practices concerning public access to environmental information with regard to the following issues, including:

(i) The scope of environmental information, the provision of environmental information by the different public authorities, the associated costs and the quality and comparability of the environmental information;

(ii) The application of restrictions on access to environmental information in accordance with the Convention's provisions;

(b) Continue monitoring and supporting the implementation of the recommendations in decision II/3 and the development of the Shared Environmental Information System across the region, as well as to promoting approaches to and standards for active dissemination of environmental information;

(c) Identify capacity-building needs and priorities with respect to public access to environmental information, taking into account issues of a systemic nature, identified through the reporting and compliance mechanisms;

(d) Continue monitoring technical developments and, where appropriate, contribute to other initiatives relevant to access to environmental information;

(e) Continue contributing to further development of the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy and PRTR.net;

10. *Invites* Parties, Signatories, other interested States and international and other organizations to participate in the Convention's activities on access to information and to allocate resources for this matter as far as possible;

11. *Entrusts* the secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, to participate in and implement, as appropriate, capacity-building activities, including workshops and trainings; to contribute to relevant initiatives under other forums; and to promote electronic information tools in the region and beyond through the maintenance and further development of the Aarhus Clearinghouse, media tools and online databases (e.g., for jurisprudence, national implementation reports and case studies on public participation at the national level and in international forums).
