

**24th Meeting of the Working Group to the Aarhus Convention
(28-29 October 2020)**

**Agenda item 7(a): Future Work programme;
Rapid Response Mechanism**

Norway

Thank you Chair,

Norway would like to focus its statement on the proposal for establishment of a Rapid Response Mechanism.

Norway thank's the Secretariat and the Bureau for preparing the background documents on a rapid response mechanism to deal with cases related to Article 3(8) of the Aarhus Convention. We also thank them for providing further information on the situation regarding environmental defenders in Parties to the Aarhus Convention through additional information notes.

The protection of human rights defenders is an important priority for Norway. For 20 years, Norway has led the work on the resolutions on human rights defenders, including the resolution on environmental human rights defenders that was adopted by consensus in the UN Human Rights Council last year.

Many of those who defend both their own rights and the rights of others do so at great risk to themselves. This applies particularly to environmental human rights defenders. This is documented by inter alia the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment and the organisation Front Line Defenders.

The additional information provided on the situation regarding environmental defenders in the parties to the Convention indicate that their situation may be challenging also within Parties to the Convention, and that breaches of the obligations under Article 3(8) might occur.

Norway is therefore positive to consider the establishment of a new Rapid Response Mechanism to protect environmental human rights defenders who exercise their rights in conformity with the Aarhus Convention.

A Rapid Response mechanism could contribute to increased protection and understanding of the important role that environmental human rights defenders play in the implementation of the Convention, human rights in general and the realisation of sustainable development in accordance with Agenda 2030. It

could also contribute to setting a high standard for how the rights of environmental human rights defenders can be protected internationally.

A Rapid Response mechanism should operate independently and impartially, react quickly and be both preventive and protective. It should complement and not complicate existing mechanisms under the Convention and should cooperate effectively with other relevant international organs procedures and mechanisms in the fields of human rights and environment. Based on these criteria the option of a Rapporteur on environmental defenders would seem particularly interesting to consider.

We look forward to hearing the views of the other Parties and to consider the establishment of a new Rapid Response Mechanism and the options presented on this basis.

Thank you Chair