

**24th Meeting of the Working Group to the Aarhus Convention
(Virtual, 28-29 October 2020)
Agenda item 7(a): Future work programme**

Norway

Norway supports the proposal from the Bureau for the draft elements of the future work programme for the period 2022-2025.

The proposed work-programme entails additional costs. These additional costs are however linked to issues and functions that are important to ensure that the rights and obligations of the Convention are well known, fully and correctly implemented and applied and also promoted in other relevant processes and foras. Civil and political human rights, including the rights provided by the Convention in the environmental field, are crucial in order for us to address the challenges we face due to climate change, the global nature crisis, pollution and covid-19 and obtain the sustainable development goals. The resolution on environmental human rights defenders that was adopted by consensus in the UN Human Rights Council last year, and the Information note on the situation regarding environmental defenders in the Aarhus Parties from 2017 to date, shows that these rights are under pressure.

Covid-19 puts pressure on our economies. However, if we do not preserve the tools we need to tackle this challenge the challenges to our climate and environment, we may face even greater challenges to our economies in our near future.

This does not mean that we should not carefully consider the costs and possibilities for reducing them without putting the efficient implementation and application of the Convention and the enjoyment of the rights it provides at risk.

The possibility of increasing the use of digital platforms for the work under the Convention and thus save travel costs are among those that should be carefully considered.

Based on our experiences especially during the last months of the Covid-19 pandemic, when the use of digital platforms have increased enormously, such platforms provide a useful tool for meetings and exchanges. We therefore think it is worth exploring the opportunity to increase the use of electronic tools in the work under the Convention, including its Task Forces. The virtual meetings of this Working Group in July and now in October is a useful experience in this regard. We should however also be aware of the challenges and limitations that

digital platforms have. We should therefore think carefully about whether and to what extent physical meetings could be wholly or partially replaced with virtual meetings.