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Access to Information, Public Participation
in Decision-making and Access to Justice
in Environmental Matters

Working Group of the Parties

Twenty-fourth meeting

Geneva, 1–3 July 2020

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

**Implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021,
including financial matters**

Report on the implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present report was prepared pursuant to the decision 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 at its sixth session (Budva, Montenegro, 11–14 September 2017) (see ECE/MP.PP/2017/2/Add.1, decision VI/5, annex I, item X). It provides an overview of the implementation of the work programme for the Convention for 2018–2021 for the period 1 April 2019 to 1 April 2020.¹

¹ For the report on the period covering 1 January 2018–31 March 2019, see ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2019/5.



Introduction

1. The present report provides an overview of the implementation of the work programme for the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PP/2017/2/Add.1, decision VI/5, annex I) for the period 1 April 2019 to 1 April 2020, focusing on operational and organizational aspects. Owing to the cross-cutting nature of the Convention, implementation of different work programme areas contributed to furthering the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals across the whole 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 16. An overview of contributions and expenditures in relation to the implementation of the work programme is provided in document ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2020/5. Only some of the activities related to access to information, capacity-building and awareness-raising regarding the Convention's Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers are included in the present document. A comprehensive report on the implementation of the work programme of the Protocol for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2019/4) was submitted to the seventh meeting of the Protocol's Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 28 and 29 November 2019).

2. In implementing the work programme, the secretariat made strenuous efforts to avoid duplication of work and the inefficient use of resources by pursuing synergies with activities under other United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) multilateral environmental agreements, United Nations agencies and other partners. This required spending more time on the preparatory phase of activities to ensure proper consultations with the chairs of the respective subsidiary bodies and partner organizations. Furthermore, the secretariat extended, and will continue to extend, the use of electronic tools (for example, email consultations, conferencing by means of web-based, video or telephone technology, online databases and the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy), with a view to rendering its activities more resource- and time-efficient.

I. Substantive issues

A. Access to information, including electronic information tools, the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy and PRTR.net

3. During the reporting period (i.e. 1 April 2019–1 April 2020), activities primarily focused on promoting the exchange of experience to improve public access to environmental information, as required by articles 4 and 5 and other relevant provisions of the Aarhus Convention, including through electronic information tools. Those activities contributed to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), and in particular target 16.10 (public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms), together with Goal 3 (health), Goal 6 (water), Goal 9 (resilient infrastructure), Goal 11 (resilient and sustainable cities), Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production), Goal 13 (climate action) and Goal 15 (Life on Land), and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030.

4. During the sixth meeting of the Task Force on Access to Information (Geneva, 3 and 4 October 2019),² the Task Force promoted the exchange of information, case studies and good practices and discussed recent and upcoming developments, focusing on active dissemination of environmental information. In particular, the Task Force discussed effective provision of information in case of an imminent threat to human health and the environment, the use of modern technologies by the public and the update of the Recommendations on electronic information tools (AC/TF.AI-6/Inf.3 and Add.1). It took stock of recent and upcoming developments with regard to public access to information related to: emissions; the application of restrictions on access to information; and the protection of whistle-blowers and other persons exercising their rights in conformity with the provisions of the Aarhus Convention.

² See www.unece.org/index.php?id=50574.

5. Back-to-back with the above-mentioned meeting, ECE and the European Environment Agency held a joint workshop “Open Data for the Environment” on 2 October 2019 in Geneva.³ The event was supported by the European Union-funded project of the European Environment Agency on further implementation of the Shared Environment Information System principles in the six countries of the European Neighbourhood Policy East region. Participants considered the project outputs of the first Regional Meeting on Open Data and E-government Services for the Environment (Kyiv, 5 and 6 March 2019) and national round tables in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The participants exchanged information on recent developments and good practices to improve the dissemination and sharing of environmental data through e-government and open data initiatives.

6. To update the Recommendations on the Electronic Information Tools pursuant to decision VI/1 of the Meeting of the Parties (ECE/MP.PP/2017/2/Add.1, decision VI/1, operative para. 13 (b) (i)), the consultation process among Parties, Signatories, other interested States and stakeholders was launched in the lead-up to the sixth meeting of the Task Force to collect drafting proposals and case studies. Taking into account the outcomes of the consultation and comments received at the meeting, the draft of the updated Recommendations was prepared and made available for further comments to be submitted by 23 April 2020, with a view to prepare the next revised draft for the consideration of the upcoming meeting of the Working Group of the Parties.

7. The secretariat also continued to manage the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy⁴ and the PRTR.net⁵ global portal. The online tools were currently being upgraded, both in terms of security, functionality and content. The two portals were used to facilitate the collection, dissemination and exchange of information related to national implementation of the Convention and relevant global and regional developments regarding implementation of principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. They also provided information regarding pollutant release and transfer registers. Parties were encouraged to continue uploading relevant news articles and resources and to provide the weblink to their national node.

8. The secretariat also continued to maintain and populate a jurisprudence database accessible through the Convention’s web page and the updated interface of the Aarhus Clearinghouse, which enhanced its search capabilities. The database promoted the exchange of jurisprudence concerning the Convention and facilitated work on access to justice. It included decisions issued by courts of law or other bodies that made reference to the Convention or its principles, as well as summaries (some of which were in English, while others were in Russian) and decisions in the original language and in English, when available. To date, there were more than 190 resources in the database, the maintenance of which was an ongoing activity.

9. The secretariat gathered a collection of case studies on electronic information tools, which it posted on a dedicated web page and updated regularly.⁶ A call for case studies remains ongoing, with a view to the continued population of the collection and sharing good practices.

10. The secretariat also finalized the upgrade of the online reporting tools and databases of national implementation reports for the Aarhus Convention⁷ and its Protocol⁸ and integration of the Aarhus Good Practice online database⁹ into the Aarhus Clearinghouse in order to align those websites with the latest information technology security standards.

³ See www.unece.org/index.php?id=52698.

⁴ See <http://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/>.

⁵ See <https://prtr.unece.org/>

⁶ See www.unece.org/env/pp/aarhus/tfai/case_studies.html.

⁷ See <https://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/national-reports/reports>.

⁸ See <https://prtr.unece.org/national-reports/reports>.

⁹ See https://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/resources-keyword?individual=1&field_keywords_target_id=good%20practice.

11. During the reporting period, the secretariat contributed to the work of other international forums or expert meetings organized by partner organizations dealing with access to environmental information and electronic information tools, such as the ECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. It further provided a number of inputs related to: the World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva, 8–12 April 2019); the development of a shared environmental information system across the region; national environmental information systems; and the integration of environmental information into e-government and open data frameworks.

B. Public participation in decision-making

12. During the reporting period, activities focused on promoting effective public participation in decision-making, as required by articles 6, 7 and 8 and other relevant provisions of the Aarhus Convention. Those activities contributed to furthering Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), and in particular target 16.7 (responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels) and target 16.10 (public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms), together with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (health) and Sustainable Development Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production).

13. During the twenty-third meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 26–28 June 2019),¹⁰ a thematic session took stock of recent developments regarding implementation of public participation during decision-making processes on specific activities, environmental impact assessments, environmental permits, plans and programmes, as well as normative acts related to the environment, within the scope of articles 6, 7 and 8 and other relevant provisions of the Convention, including public participation in a transboundary context. The session addressed issues raised in decision VI/2 (ECE/MP.PP/2017/2/Add.1), with the aim of advancing the implementation of the public participation pillar of the Convention and overcome existing challenges. During the discussion, systemic challenges, positive trends and suggested actions for Parties were identified. The session further looked at the increasingly important topic of protection of persons exercising their rights in conformity with the provisions of the Convention.

14. Pursuant to decision VI/2 of the Meeting of the Parties, the secretariat began preparatory work regarding the organization of the ninth meeting of the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making, scheduled to take place in Geneva, on 29 and 30 October 2020.

15. A call for case studies on public participation in environmental decision-making was ongoing, with a view to the continued population of the Aarhus Clearinghouse Good Practice online database.

C. Access to justice

16. During the reporting period, numerous activities focused on promoting effective access to justice, thereby contributing to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), in particular target 16.3 (rule of law at the national and international levels and equal access to justice for all) and target 16.10 (public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms).

17. Following the outcomes of the eleventh meeting of the Task Force on Access to Justice (Geneva, 27 and 28 February 2018),¹¹ a survey on access to justice in information cases was launched. The draft report was then prepared by the Chair of the Task Force summarizing the responses received to the survey. The report provided a basis for discussion

¹⁰ See www.unece.org/index.php?id=50755.

¹¹ See www.unece.org/index.php?id=47184.

at the twelfth meeting of the Task Force (Geneva, 28 February and 1 March 2019).¹² The draft report was further revised by the Chair in the light of the comments made at and after the meeting and made available for comments by Parties and stakeholders by 1 April 2020. Pursuant to decision VI/5 of the Meeting of the Parties (ECE/MP.PP/2017/2/Add.1), preparatory work was begun for the thematic session on access to justice at the upcoming Working Group of the Parties.

18. During the reporting period, the secretariat contributed to the work of other international forums or expert meetings organized by partner organizations dealing with access to justice, and continued to populate the Aarhus Clearinghouse with relevant resources. A call for case summaries related to the Convention remains ongoing, with a view to the continued population of the jurisprudence database.

D. Genetically modified organisms

19. Bilateral collaboration on genetically modified organisms was ongoing between the secretariats of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The two secretariats jointly organized the third joint Global Round Table on Public Awareness, Access to Information and Public Participation regarding Living Modified Organisms/Genetically Modified Organisms, (Geneva, 16–18 December 2019).¹³ The meeting brought together representatives of Governments, academia, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other experts engaged in the implementation of both instruments from numerous countries of Europe, Asia, Africa and North and South America, with the aim of developing the capacities of authorities through the sharing of experiences and expertise. The event thus also helped Governments to further the achievement of a number of Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 15 and Goal 16. In order to enhance the capacities of authorities in those areas, the Global Round Table featured a training session during which participants practised identifying the public concerned for different cases: deliberate release, contained use and placing on the market of living modified organisms/genetically modified organisms. There was also discussion of how to apply a step-by-step approach to a procedure, which, if followed correctly, led to effective public participation in decision-making.

20. The outcomes of panel discussions held at the Global Round Table were used as a basis for reviewing a draft pocket guide on promoting effective access to information and public participation regarding living modified organisms/genetically modified organisms, which had been developed by the two secretariats following the second joint Aarhus Convention/Convention on Biological Diversity round table on public awareness, access to information and public participation regarding living modified organisms/genetically modified organisms (Geneva, 15–17 November 2016). The pocket guide is intended to assist Parties, other interested Governments and stakeholders in furthering efforts on access to information and public participation.

21. During the reporting period, no new Party ratified the amendment on genetically modified organisms. Two more Parties from among the following list must ratify the amendment for it to enter into force: Albania; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Belarus; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; North Macedonia; Tajikistan; Turkmenistan; and Ukraine. The Parties whose ratification of the amendment would count towards its entry into force had been repeatedly called upon during the previous intersessional period to take specific steps towards ratification and to provide the secretariat with a written explanation of the status of ratification. At its sixth session (Budva, Montenegro, 11–14 September 2017), the Meeting of the Parties had requested the Working Group of the Parties to continue monitoring closely progress towards the entry into force of the amendment on genetically modified organisms (see ECE/MP.PP/2017/2, para. 38).

¹² See www.unece.org/index.php?id=50570.

¹³ See www.unece.org/index.php?id=50759.

II. Procedures and mechanisms

A. Compliance mechanism

22. During the reporting period, the Compliance Committee held three regular meetings, namely, its sixty-fourth, sixty-fifth and sixty-sixth meetings, and in addition six virtual meetings. Of those, two regular meetings (Geneva, 1–5 July and 4–8 November) and three virtual meetings were held in 2019 and one regular meeting (Geneva, 9–13 March) and three virtual meetings were held in 2020. Between 1 April 2019 and 1 April 2020, 13 new communications were forwarded to the Committee for consideration as to their preliminary admissibility.¹⁴ The Committee determined 6 of those communications to be admissible on a preliminary basis and 7 to be inadmissible. No submissions were made to the Committee by Parties during the reporting period and the secretariat did not make any referrals. As at 1 April 2020, the Committee had 51 cases pending, consisting of 50 communications and 1 submission.

23. In addition to the above-mentioned 51 cases, the Committee was following up on 10 decisions adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its sixth session on the compliance of individual Parties, namely decisions VI/8a–e and VI/8g–k, concerning, respectively, Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, Czechia, Kazakhstan, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Committee was also following up on two requests from the Meeting of the Parties concerning the European Union and Turkmenistan¹⁵ and two findings of non-compliance adopted since the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties.¹⁶ The second progress reports of the Parties concerned on the 10 decisions and two requests of the Meeting of the Parties, as well as the first progress report on one of the findings of non-compliance adopted since the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties,¹⁷ were due on 1 October 2019. After taking into account the progress reports and comments from communicants and observers received thereon, the Committee adopted its second progress reviews (and, in one case, first progress review) and sent them to the Parties concerned and observers in late February/early March 2020. At its sixty-sixth meeting (Geneva, 9–13 March 2020), the Committee held audio conferences in open session with representatives of the Parties concerned and observers in order to discuss the Committee's progress reviews. The audio conferences also provided Parties and observers with an opportunity to ask any questions they might have had regarding the Committee's follow-up procedure and what might be required to fully implement the decision, request or Committee's findings concerning their compliance.

24. The recently adopted revised *Guide to the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee*¹⁸ was currently being translated into French and Russian.

25. An informal network of chairs of the compliance and implementation bodies under the ECE multilateral environmental agreements had been established in spring 2012, on the initiative of the Chair of the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee. The aim of the network was to exchange information and lessons learned on the work of the bodies and to

¹⁴ For details, see the reports of the Compliance Committee, available at www.unece.org/env/pp/ccMeetings.html.

¹⁵ Request ACCC/M/2017/2 (Turkmenistan) (see ECE/MP.PP/2017/2/Add.1, decision VI/8, para. 19) and request ACCC/M/2017/3 (European Union) (see ECE/MP.PP/2017/2, para. 63).

¹⁶ Communications ACCC/C/2014/104 (Netherlands) (ECE/MP.PP/C.1/2019/3) and ACCC/C/2013/107 (Ireland) (ECE/MP.PP/C.1/2019/9).

¹⁷ Communication ACCC/C/2014/104 (Netherlands) (ECE/MP.PP/C.1/2019/3).

¹⁸ Available at www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/compliance/CC_Guidance/Guide_to_the_Aarhus_Convention_Compliance_Committee__2019.pdf.

share views on how to improve implementation and compliance mechanisms. Due to a lack of capacity in the secretariat, the date for the next meeting has not yet been set.¹⁹

B. Capacity-building activities

26. In addition to capacity-building activities mentioned under other areas of work to build synergies and enhance coordination with partners, the secretariat continuously maintained close cooperation with and provided advisory support to United Nations partner agencies and other international organizations within the Aarhus Convention capacity-building coordination framework.²⁰

27. Detailed information on capacity-building activities, including current trends and considerations, was available in the Report on capacity-building (ECE/MP.PP/2017/7) and its accompanying (informal) document (AC/MOP-6/Inf.2),²¹ which had been submitted to the Meeting of the Parties for consideration at its sixth session.

28. The secretariat promoted the Convention and the latest decisions of the Convention's Meeting of the Parties at the annual meeting of the Aarhus Centres, organized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (Vienna, 16 and 17 October 2019). The meeting focused on the role of Aarhus Centres in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development linked to the Convention, and on ways to ensure their sustainable functioning through, for example, resource mobilization.

29. The secretariat also provided substantive support to a high-level workshop "Action across sectors and borders for sustainable future of the Drina River Basin", held in Belgrade on 29 October 2019. The secretariat further provided input to the documents, publications and related meetings to promote the application of the Aarhus Convention in the area of water management and energy.

30. The secretariat, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) are currently developing an online course covering Sustainable Development Goal 16, the Aarhus Convention and the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement), to be published on the InforMEA e-learning platform.²²

31. The secretariat promoted the Aarhus Convention's requirements regarding public participation in decision-making on lifetime extension of nuclear power plants at the international workshop on environmental and health impacts of lifetime extension of nuclear power plants (Lisbon, 5 June 2019), organized by the International Association for Impact Assessment, in cooperation with the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context secretariat and the Portuguese Association for Impact Assessment.

32. The secretariat provided training to operational staff of the European Investment Bank on provisions of the Convention relevant to the Bank's operations (Luxembourg, 24 October 2019).

33. In addition, the secretariat liaised continuously with partner organizations, potential donors and interested countries and stakeholders and handled a number of consultations regarding capacity-building activities through electronic means, providing advisory support as required.

¹⁹ Further information regarding the joint work and informal networks of ECE multilateral environmental agreements is available at www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/joint-work-and-informal-networks.html.

²⁰ Meeting documents and other information on this work area are available at www.unece.org/env/pp/oa.html.

²¹ Available at www.unece.org/env/pp/aarhus/mop6_docs.html, under the "Background reports and documents (Category II)" tab, item 7 (c) Capacity-building.

²² See <https://elearning.informea.org/>.

34. Some partner organizations discontinued or changed their approach to operations. Notably, the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework²³ was rolled out in 16 countries.²⁴ The Framework can provide an opportunity for multi-partner capacity-building activities related to the Convention and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers in those countries, which will require close cooperation between the governance and environmental clusters of the Framework. The current preparatory work covers 2021–2025. It will be crucially important for the long-term sustainability of activities that Parties provide support to such an approach to capacity- building.

35. Following the expression of interest by Uzbekistan in learning from the experience of implementing the Aarhus Convention, the secretariat provided advisory support and capacity-building to the country's authorities. That included the secretariat's mission to Tashkent, on 29 and 30 May 2019, to meeting with the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Ecology and Environmental Protection and international organizations based in Tashkent, ongoing legislative review and the preparations for the international round table "Aarhus Convention: Effective public participation for good governance, healthy environment and sustainable development", to be organized in cooperation with the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Ecology and Environmental Protection, Italy, the OSCE Project Coordinator and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Uzbekistan (the meeting was postponed due to Coronavirus disease restrictions).

36. The Aarhus Clearinghouse was increasingly being used to disseminate information about funding opportunities, workshops and training events relevant to building capacities regarding the implementation of the Aarhus Convention.

C. Reporting mechanism

37. The Meeting of the Parties had set 1 November 2017 as the later deadline for submission of the national implementation reports for the 2017 reporting cycle. To date, only the Republic of Moldova had failed to submit its national implementation report for the 2017 reporting cycle.

III. Promotional activities

A. Awareness-raising regarding and promotion of the Convention and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers

38. The secretariat, or relevant experts invited by the secretariat to do so, participated in conferences, seminars, workshops and other events in various countries to promote and raise awareness regarding the Convention and its Protocol at the international level. Below is a non-exhaustive account of the events.

39. The secretariat promoted synergy within the Multilateral Environment Agreement Information and Knowledge Management initiative and the Fifth Montevideo Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law (Montevideo Programme V)²⁵ coordinated by UNEP and took part in relevant meetings.

40. In 2019, the secretariat provided substantive input on the Convention and its Protocol for the third cycle of the environmental performance review of Uzbekistan.²⁶

²³ See <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/cooperation-framework>.

²⁴ Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

²⁵ See

https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/30819/Final_MonteV_Assess.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

²⁶ See www.unece.org/index.php?id=52014.

41. The secretariat made a presentation on ensuring the effective use of the Aarhus Convention compliance mechanism, at the law conference “21 Today: The Aarhus Convention Coming of Age?” (London, 25 June 2019).

42. A promotional brochure entitled *Protecting your environment: The power is in your hands*, addressing the general public interested in the Convention and its provisions, was published in all six official languages of the United Nations — Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish — and widely distributed.²⁷ A Japanese-language translation was prepared by the NGO Aarhus Net Japan.

43. The secretariat also promoted the Convention and the Protocol through numerous reports and articles prepared under the auspices of ECE and partner organizations. In addition, the secretariat continued to carry out an enhanced outreach exercise, distributing materials about the Convention and the Protocol to national focal points, Aarhus Centres, other United Nations bodies, international organizations, NGOs and academic institutions in the ECE region and beyond.

44. Following a formal expression of interest by Guinea Bissau, the secretariat continued to provide advisory support to the country in its efforts to accede to the Convention. The secretariat is also handling ongoing consultations with Mongolia regarding the Convention and its Protocol.

B. Promotion of the Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums and other interlinkages with relevant international bodies and processes

45. As to the implementation of the Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums (ECE/MP.PP/2005/2/Add.5, decision II/4, annex), at the twenty-third meeting of the Working Group of the Parties, a thematic session on promoting the Convention’s principles in international forums was held, focusing on the promotion of the principles of the Convention in the policies of international financial institutions and on cross-cutting issues, such as: innovative practices; different modalities for engaging stakeholders; self-organization of stakeholders; hosting an international event; and identification of the public. The Working Group also considered the promotion of the Convention principles within the context of International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) processes. Participants recognized the need for further transparency and effective public participation in ICAO-related processes. Additional topics included: a relevant update on the processes under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; the policy on stakeholder engagement of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP; and the high-level political forum on sustainable development and Sustainable Development Goal-related processes.

46. During the reporting period, the secretariat continued to support efforts to promote the Convention and its principles and interlinkages with various international forums, working with other United Nations bodies (in particular, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UNEP, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNDP, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals and the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan Coordinating Unit), other environmental treaty bodies (such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the Minamata Convention on Mercury, the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents and the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context) and other international organizations (for example, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, OSCE, the Group on Earth Observations and the World Bank Group).

²⁷ United Nations publication, ECE/MP.PP/9. Available at www.unece.org/index.php?id=35452.

47. The secretariat also promoted the principles of the Convention at side events held during meetings of the subsidiary bodies of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in June 2019, in preparation for the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (Madrid, 2–13 December 2019). Moreover, the secretariat promoted effective and inclusive public participation in climate-related decision-making at different events taking place at the preparatory meeting for the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (San José, 8–10 October 2019) and contributed to a side event “Realizing the right to participate: Empowering people as agents of more effective climate action” at the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the Parties (Madrid, 9 December 2019). The secretariat also contributed to the joint submission by OHCHR, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNEP, ECE, the United Nations Children’s Fund and ECLAC for the review of the Doha work programme on Article 6 of the Convention (FCCC/SBI/2019/L.3/Add.1), also known as a call for recommendations and views on future work to enhance Action for Climate Empowerment.

48. In response to a call by the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the secretariat promoted the principles of the Convention during the fortieth session of the Human Rights Council (Geneva, 25 February–22 March 2019).

49. The secretariat also promoted the Convention’s relevant obligations at the expert seminar on best practices, lessons learned and the way forward with regard to the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment organized by OHCHR and UNEP in Geneva, on 20 and 21 June 2019.

50. During the reporting period, upon request, the secretariat also provided ongoing advisory support, including by engaging relevant experts, to ECLAC regarding the negotiation of the Escazú Agreement. In this regard, the secretariat provided advisory support, in particular to share experiences and lessons learned regarding rules of procedure of the Convention’s Meeting of the Parties and the compliance mechanism, to the signatory countries of the Escazú Agreement at their first meeting (San José, 11 and 12 October 2019).

51. In addition, the Aarhus Convention secretariat continued to provide advice to various international forums, academic bodies, NGOs and other stakeholders upon request.

52. The Aarhus Clearinghouse was being increasingly used to disseminate information about public consultations and other relevant information under various international processes and forums.

C. Coordination and oversight of intersessional activities

53. During the reporting period, the status of the Convention and its amendment on genetically modified organisms with regard to accession, ratification or approval remained unchanged. As at 1 April 2020, there were 47 Parties to the Convention and 31 Parties to the amendment on genetically modified organisms. The ratification of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers by Montenegro, on 11 October 2017, and by Kazakhstan, on 24 January 2020, raised the number of Parties to that instrument to 37.

54. Coordination and oversight of intersessional activities during the reporting period were conducted by the Working Group of the Parties and its Bureau during regular meetings of those bodies.

55. The Bureau held its forty-fourth meeting in Geneva, on 28 June 2019. The forty-fifth meeting was held virtually on 26 September 2019 and its forty-sixth meeting is scheduled for 25 and 26 February 2020. The Bureau also held regular electronic consultations on different subjects.

56. The secretariat has started the preparations for the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention back-to-back with the fourth session of the Meeting of the

Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, expected to be held in Tbilisi, from 18 to 22 October 2021.
