

Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention on 1-3 July 2020

Statement by OHCHR for the session on Thursday, 2 July, 11.45 a.m.–12.10 p.m. Agenda item 5 on developments and interlinkages relevant to the Aarhus Convention

Distinguished delegates, colleagues and friends,

My name is Viktoria Aberg, a human rights officer working with the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, Mr. David Boyd. I would like to provide you with an update on the activities conducted on behalf of the Special Rapporteur.

Good practices on the implementation and promotion of the right to a healthy environment

In March 2020, the Special Rapporteur, presented his thematic report on good practices on the implementation and promotion of the right to a healthy environment at the Human Rights Council.

The report describes 500+ good practices, both procedural and substantive –followed by States in recognizing and implementing the right to live in a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

The procedural elements, as well defined in the Aarhus Convention, are the rights to access to information, public participation, and access to justice and effective remedies.

The substantive elements include clean air, a safe climate, access to safe water and adequate sanitation, healthy and sustainably produced food, non-toxic environments in which to live, work, study and play, and healthy ecosystems.

In the report many good practices from State Parties of the Aarhus convention were highlighted.

Human Rights and Healthy ecosystems

In his ongoing effort to provide additional clarity regarding the substantive elements of the right to a healthy environment, the Special Rapporteur is currently preparing a thematic report focusing on the human rights obligations related to biodiversity and healthy ecosystems (following earlier reports on clean air and a safe climate). This report will be presented to the General Assembly in October 2020.

Realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment

During the Human Rights Council's 44th session, on 1 July, there was a full-day meeting on the rights of the child with the theme: "Realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment".

The Special Rapporteur participated as a speaker on the topic; the Time for Action is Now: Recognizing Children's Right to Live in a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment.

The aim of the event was to gather experts to promote the understanding of the relationship between children's rights and the relevant international legal frameworks, to strengthen commitments to adopt a child rights-based approach to environmental initiatives, and to identify concrete measures for action.

The Recognition of the right to a healthy environment

The right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is now recognized in law by more than 80 per cent (156 out of 193) of member States of the United Nations.

Out of the 46 States that are parties to the Aarhus Convention (which refers to the right to a healthy environment as the objective of the treaty in Article 1), 34 have also recognized the right to a healthy environment constitutionally and/or through their environmental legislation.

Ongoing efforts are being made at the Human Rights Council to secure the recognition of the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment through a resolution.

On behalf of the UN Special Rapporteur, he would once again like to invite Parties to the Convention to consider supporting the global recognition of the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment so that the right can be enjoyed by everyone, everywhere.

The recognition will not only ensure the enjoyment of everyone's right to live in a healthy environment but it will also help promote the objective and principles of the Convention and facilitate Parties to meet their human rights obligations at the same time.

Thank you.