

The below statement on the future work plan has been delivered by the Center for International Environmental Law on behalf of the European ECO Forum at the 24th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties of the Aarhus Convention on October 28th, 2020.

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This intervention will focus on the work foreseen in the future work plan in relation to Public Participation in International Forums.

While we are going to address recent developments related to Public Participation in International Forums tomorrow, we believe that it would be highly beneficial to consider today our vision for the work that will be implemented in relation to PPIF during the next 4-years long intersessional period.

In that context, we welcome the informal note prepared by the co-chair ahead of the session and believe that it provides a good basis for these discussions. We also are really grateful for:

- the work accomplished by the Secretariat in relation to PPIF since the MOP-6,
- to stakeholders who contributed to promoting international democracy in international forums,
- and to those Parties who championed Aarhus principles in these spaces and processes - recognizing in particular the role of the Aarhus focal points who diligently upheld their mission by reaching out proactively to relevant colleagues within their administration to report back on our discussion and to inform them of relevance of Aarhus in other processes.

In Budva at the last MOP, we collectively reaffirmed

our strong commitment to promote environmental democracy and its key components, namely, access to environmental information, public participation and access to justice, in the ECE region and beyond, as essential prerequisites for building a sustainable future for current generations and those to come.

The work undergoing under the Convention in relation to Public Participation in International Forums is a critical tool to deliver on this commitment.

Since the adoption of the Convention, work related to PPIF has included three dimensions:

- **Reviewing emerging issues and upcoming opportunities in specific forums in a reactive manner** - tomorrow's session will be another example of this.

- **Raising awareness about the Convention, the obligation established in article 3.7 of the Convention and the Almaty Guidelines** that Parties adopted in 2004 to guide the realization of this obligation.
- **Working with UN entities and other international forums, acting as a hub** for the gathering of knowledge and the exchange of lessons learned and good practices related to transparent, participatory and accountable governance at the international level.

Work accomplished following the Maastricht and Budva MOPs has focused primarily on the first two dimensions. To increase the ability of the Aarhus Convention to truly act as a source of guidance and inspiration promoting environmental democracy in the ECE region and beyond, we believe that there is still some opportunity to seize in strengthening the ability of the Secretariat to promote environmental democracy in international forms working with relevant UN entities. The Parties had provided the mandate to the Secretariat to do so in the past - and the Secretariat had demonstrated that it can indeed play this unique role engaging a wide range of UN secretariats and promoting the sharing of lessons learned and good practices.

Based on our experience and that of our close partners engaging in many international forums but also on conversations with governmental delegates from Aarhus parties and officers of relevant UN Secretariat, we believe that there is for instance great potential in fostering a conversation regarding how processes and modalities related to Public Participation in International Forums could contribute to inequity in participation and to facilitate participation by marginalized groups who may lack resources. Exchange of good practices related to this issue could foster the contribution of the Aarhus process to promoting environmental democracy in global environmental governance.

While the future work plan reflects well the monitoring and capacity-building functions, we believe that the future work programme should also reflect the potential role that the Secretariat could play in relation to fostering the sharing of lessons learned and good practices between relevant forums. **We therefore suggest that the description of the tasks that might be considered under work area IX include the words “workshop(s), roundtable(s)” as currently done in relation to the work on “Genetically modified organisms”.**

We believe that this would provide greater flexibility for the Secretariat to implement its activities under PPIF without precluding at this stage any particular work with the budget provisioned for this work area.

I thank you for your attention.