

**Opening of the second slot and adoption of procedures to facilitate remote participation and decision-making in the meeting**

**14b:** Switzerland thanks the Bureau for the draft operation Procedures to facilitate remote participation and decision-making in this meeting of the Working Group of the Parties. We believe that the proposed procedures allow for an active participation of Member states and stakeholders.

We would like to emphasize, though, that the draft operations procedures do not predetermine any decisions taken by the Meeting of the Parties. Therefore, we support the proposed wording by the Bureau that consensus will be reached if no proposed revisions or comments are made by Parties regarding the draft documents circulated for approval by the deadline set.

**Access to information/recommendations**

**9bis/15 c:** Switzerland believes that strengthening the access to environmental information is important to ensure a good environmental governance. Timely, reliable, high quality and easily accessible environmental information is essential to inform citizens about the state of the environment. We believe that the draft decision should focus only on the promotion of effective access to information and not the promotion of the application of the principles of the Convention in international forums. We propose not to accept the changes proposed in relation to the IAEA.

**Recommendations 22b:** Switzerland believes, that strengthening the access to environmental information also by using electronic information tools leads to an improved dissemination of environmental information in the sense of the Aarhus Convention. Only a well-informed public can play its part in ensuring that environmental standards are upheld. However, the processing and preparation of data in order to provide environmental information for public participation by using electronic information tools may be time- and cost consuming. Therefore, we support that information should be predominantly accessible without charge. We, therefore, propose to rephrase the second part of the sentence in each case as “predominantly without charge”.

**Access to justice (We might not take the floor, here. It depends on how the discussion is going).**

**3bis:** *Switzerland participates in discussions to a possible right to a healthy environment. We acknowledge the importance of these discussions, which are, however, not yet finalized. We, therefore, support the text proposed by the bureau.*

**Rapid Response Mechanism to deal with cases related to Article 3 (8) of the Convention:**

**RRM, annex Part. D:** We welcome the proposed rapid response mechanism to deal with cases related to Article 3 (8) of the Convention. The establishment of a new rapid response mechanism in form of an independent rapporteur to address the harassment of environmental defenders supports the protection of persons exercising their rights and therefore allow each pillar of the Convention to unfold effect. Switzerland believes that the establishment of an independent rapporteur who is not attached to the Compliance committee is the most effective option. We support the wording proposed by the bureau as it allows for a clear differentiation to other kinds of appointees and emphasizes its tasks.

Environmental activists might indeed face severe consequences as imprisonment and need an urgent help. However, we should take into consideration the available resources: The establishment of a rapporteur requests a lot of resources by the new rapporteur in order to be effective. We apprehend that the effectiveness might be jeopardized if there is no requirement at all to use or at least try to use domestic remedies. We, therefore, support the proposal of the bureau.

We believe, though, that the possibility to discuss about alternative and effective options of financial arrangements shall remain open. Therefore, the development and extension of the rapporteur’s duty shall remain open.

### Speaking Note

Switzerland welcomes the proposed strategic plan 2022-2030. We agree with the adjusted vision and mission, in particular concerning the role of the Convention in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the commitment to ensuring the protection of environmental defenders.

**p. 28:** *Switzerland supports the wording proposed by the European Union. We believe that the extension of the non-exhaustive list may imply a priority of on the exchange on good-practice.*

### Work programme:

Switzerland welcomes the proposed work programme for 2022-2025. We agree with the strengthening of capacity building, awareness-raising and promotion by the introduction of advisory assistance. We further welcome the proposed new mechanism under the work area on the compliance mechanism and the strengthening of the legal support to this work area. Compliance with the Convention is one of the main work areas which is crucial in order to allow each pillar of the Convention to unfold effect. The programme, therefore, is ambitious as it should be.

However, as the work programme suggests, we **should take into consideration the available resources:** We believe that the possibility to discuss about alternative options of financial arrangements shall remain open.

### Declaration

**Comments WHO:** Switzerland would like to remind the Working Group that the Aarhus Convention attends predominantly environmental matters. Therefore, we welcome an environmental focus in the draft declaration on environmental democracy for sustainable, inclusive and resilient development as well. We suggest to remove the adjustments of the WHO.

### Financial arrangements

First, Switzerland thanks the Secretariat for its efforts to cope well with the difficult budgetary situation. For Switzerland the predictability and stability of financial means to achieve the implementation of the programme of work is crucial. We believe, that the current scheme of contributions, based on voluntary support cannot guarantee the implementation of all the activities under the work programme, not even the core activities even when those are prioritized.

In our view the best arrangement based on equitable sharing of burden and sound financial management would be a mandatory scheme of contributions, based on the adjusted UN scale of assessment. It offers the necessary stability, predictability and equitable funding of the activities under the work programme of 2022-2025 that are not covered by UN regular budget.

We continue to support Option C [mandatory contributions] of the draft elements of possible financial arrangements.

Switzerland is open to discuss the modalities of such a scheme that should be decided upon by the Meeting of the Parties.