

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**MESSAGE TO THE JOINT HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT
OF THE MEETINGS OF THE PARTIES
TO THE CONVENTION ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION,
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE
IN ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS AND ITS PROTOCOL ON POLLUTANT
RELEASE AND TRANSFER REGISTERS
Geneva, 21 October 2021**

Twenty years ago, the Aarhus Convention entered into force, bridging the gap between human and environmental rights. Today, as the devastating effects of climate change continue to ravage the world, the Convention's core purpose – of allowing people to protect their wellbeing and that of future generations – has never been more critical.

Over the past two decades, the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers have inspired and advanced environmental democracy across the globe, despite significant challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added new stresses and tests to these efforts. However, in times of crisis, it is even more crucial that Governments uphold their commitment to environmental democracy.

Only if we prioritize environmental concerns and environmental democracy, will our recovery from the pandemic be sustainable. Spatial planning and large-scale infrastructure projects hold great potential for many countries to both spur economic growth, and contribute to much needed efforts to limit global warming to well below 2°C.

However, we must remain cognizant of the significant impact such projects have on ecosystems and human health and well-being. Effective public participation is essential in each step of the decision-making process for these projects. Those who speak out on environmental issues must not be silenced.

I remain deeply concerned by the targeting of environmental activists. I welcome your efforts to establish a rapid response mechanism to protect environmental defenders. This is an important contribution to help advance my [Call to Action for Human Rights](#).

I commend Governments, civil society, academia, the private sector and all other stakeholders for your hard work in strengthening implementation of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol.

Together, let us keep working to support a sustainable, inclusive and resilient future for all.