

Speech by Mr. Eamon Ryan T.D., Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications,
Ireland.

To be delivered to the High Level Segment of the Aarhus Convention Meeting of the Parties.

Weblink to video of Minister Ryan's speech <https://we.tl/t-4kV1lJMbiE>

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Meeting of the Parties of the Aarhus Convention and PRTR Protocol

Joint High Level Segment

Agenda item - draft Geneva Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Sustainable, Inclusive and
Resilient Development

Geneva, Thursday, 21 October 2021

Via recorded message

It is my honour to address the Joint High Level Segment and I only regret that I am not there with
you in person.

Firstly, I wish to thank, the Chair, Secretariat, Bureau and the Compliance Committee for all your
hard work. And I would like, in particular, to complement the Secretariat for the very successful
organisation of this 7th Meeting of the Parties. I can only imagine the challenges faced by them in
bringing 47 parties together both in person and virtually. Well done to all involved.

I am pleased to add my voice to the many others at the MOP, in support of the draft Geneva
Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Development. As
we face into the next decade of challenges in delivering on our Sustainable Developmental Goals,

allowing our citizens to be actively engaged and participate in spatial planning and large scale infrastructure development processes is now more important than ever. It is timely for the Geneva Declaration to re-state the human rights and environmental principles of the Aarhus Convention.

To complement this we need to ensure that every citizen is empowered to exercise their rights under the Convention and is not to be afraid nor face adversity in doing so. I am particularly proud, therefore, of Ireland's decision to provide funding, together with our Austrian friends, for the Rapid Response Mechanism, further to paragraph 27 of the Declaration

Ireland's 50% funding and 100% support of the Rapid Response Mechanism is an expression of solidarity with environmental defenders in the ECE Region and also around the world. In addition to giving a voice to environmental defenders in our own Region, we hope that it may serve as a model of best practice beyond the ECE region, as the Aarhus Convention, has already been the acknowledged model for the Escazú Agreement in The Caribbean and Latin America.

Protection of the environment and sustainable development, in contrast to short term exploitation of natural resources - which usually benefits only a few and in the short term – can instead yield an ongoing, long term economic dividend for the many and at the same time, allow the continuation of ecosystem services, which have evolved over aeons.

John Knox, former UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, noted that “For their tireless work in empowering communities and protecting ecosystems, environmental defenders are killed in startling numbers. Murder is not the only way environmental defenders are

persecuted; for every 1 killed, there are 20 to 100 others harassed, unlawfully and lawfully arrested, and sued for defamation, amongst other intimidations". This contravention of the most basic of human rights cannot continue.

It is anticipated that the Rapid Response Mechanism will, with the advantage of speed, complement the meticulous work of the Compliance Committee. The RRM will be in a position to shine a light of justice into dark corners and call upon the authorities of the Party concerned to uphold the rule of law. It will hold us all accountable to our citizens and force us all to live up to the commitments which we all made, when we signed the Convention.

I believe that the Rapid Response Mechanism will be a voice for the women and men, who are often the last line of defence for the land, air, forests, waters and wetlands, which constitute our life-support system on Earth; For those men and women who have the courage, or are driven by desperation to speak truth to power. The Geneva Declaration and the Rapid Response Mechanism are a message to such people, that we are on your side!