

Seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention)

Fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs)

Joint High-level segment

21 October 2021

Introductory Statement to the SG statement

21 October 2021

(XIX, Palais des Nations)

UNECE Executive Secretary Introductory Statement

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be here with you all today at the Joint High-Level Segment to the Seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs.

The UNECE takes great pride in servicing the Convention and its Protocol, and I would first like to take a moment on behalf of the UNECE to thank all ministers, deputy ministers and heads of delegations from Parties and Signatories to the Aarhus Convention and to its Protocol, together with representatives of other States, international, regional and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), parliamentarians, private sector and other representatives of civil society for their active participation today.

The UNECE celebrates this month's landmark decision of the Human Rights Council. We now have a responsibility as an international community, to find ways with which we can uphold this right to a clean, safe, and sustainable environment. I am proud to say that over the past 20 years of the Aarhus Convention's being in force, the Aarhus Convention has been working tirelessly for the protection of this human right, even before it was officially recognized. As you know, the rights outlined in the Aarhus Convention ensure that the public has access to information, and the right to participate in all decisions related to the environment that may affect their well-being. If necessary, they also ensure public access to justice when they believe that the above rights were violated.

Therefore, the Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs are exemplary tools with which Parties can lead the way in ensuring a sustainable environment to present and future generations. This is particularly important in the context of large-scale infrastructure projects and spatial planning, as we have seen their significant impacts on community's daily lives, environment, and futures. I commend you all for meeting here today to discuss how applying the principles of the Convention and its Protocol can minimize their impact and ensure a sustainable environment.

I look forward to seeing the constructive exchange of views, knowledge, experience and expertise today. I greatly admire this collaborative spirit and hope that it will lead to the successful adoption of the draft of the Geneva Declaration, as it can strengthen the Convention's implementation by furthering an inclusive and participatory processes in spatial planning and large-scale infrastructure projects.

I am pleased to announce that we have received a statement from the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres to welcome your hard work today. The Secretary-General gives very serious attention to the issues of democracy and the environment, and I have the honour to read the statement on his behalf.