



**7<sup>th</sup> session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (MOP-7)  
(Geneva, 18-21 October 2021, hybrid format)**

**STATEMENTS BY THE EU AND ITS MEMBER STATES**

**Joint High-level Segment**

**(Geneva/hybrid, 21 October 2021)**

**Item 4. Geneva Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Development**

Statement:

Excellences,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am speaking on behalf of the EU and its Member States.

The European Union and its Member States welcome the draft Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Development. We acknowledge that the text is the result of the broad, comprehensive and effective discussion, which was conducted despite all the challenges posed by the ongoing health crisis.

The need for proactive dissemination of environmental information has never been greater, given the practical challenges posed by measures introduced to curb the pandemic. Restriction of the freedom of assembly and movement, posed by most of the governments to establish control over the spread of the virus, undoubtedly reduced the public's rights, also when dealing with environmental issues. As a consequence, it is especially important today to provide the public with adequate access to information, to enable participation in decision-making processes and secure access to justice. A state of emergency is not and cannot be an excuse for systematically limiting the public's rights to participate and decide.

Application of all the Aarhus Convention instruments is particularly important when dealing with spatial planning and large-scale infrastructure projects, which usually have a significant and complex impact on the environment and people's wellbeing. Sustainable and quality infrastructure plays a crucial role in society. It is indispensable for delivering better and more inclusive economic, social and environmental conditions. Planning and building infrastructure is very complex, long-term by nature, and it involves numerous risks and many different stakeholders. In order to minimize possible conflicts, it is important to ensure that all environmental and social concerns can be articulated and be fully considered and addressed, when dealing with such projects. In this respect, it is key to ensure transparency and the rule of law, public participation in decision making, and effective remedies throughout the planning and development process.



The Aarhus Convention and its Protocol play a significant role in safeguarding these principles and working towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, we would like to reaffirm the strong commitment of the EU and its Member States to further promote and implement the principles of the Convention and the Protocol.

Thank you for your attention.

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