

**Remarks by the Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, Mr Tawfik Jelassi,
on the occasion of the
7th 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),
and 4th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers,
Palais des Nations, Geneva
21 October 2021**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to participate in today's session, as part of the meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention. This Convention, adopted more than 20 years ago, was one of the first international mechanisms that provided for the right of everyone to receive access to environmental information.

Today's discussion, on the Draft Geneva Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Development¹, is a further opportunity to highlight the intersection between access to information and environmental matters, two vital issues for sustainable development that are also central to UNESCO's mandate.

Since 2000, the number of laws guaranteeing the right to information increased from 39 to 132, according to UNESCO data.

Over the past 20 years, global progress on access to information has also been significant in practice. Evolving norms favouring transparency and

¹ During the meeting, participants (including Ministers and heads of delegation of Parties) will be invited to consider and adopt the [Geneva Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Development](#). The draft declaration is a policy-oriented document, which strives to communicate the key messages regarding the role of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol in promoting sustainable, inclusive and resilient development.

new technological possibilities to digitize information in the public domain have brought a global upsurge of access to information.

But more can be done to ensure universal access to information, which is a *sine qua non* to address today and tomorrow's challenges, be they environmental challenges, health emergencies and other crises.

In this context, UNESCO plays a crucial role in advocating for access to information worldwide, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 16, target 10, on "public access to information and fundamental freedoms".

UNESCO tracks progress in this regard, by monitoring SDG indicator 16.10.2, on the "number of countries that adopt *and* implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information."

This year's survey on this indicator saw more than 100 countries sending in responses, and the results are encouraging: nine out of ten respondents to the survey have legal guarantees for access to information.

The findings also demonstrated the importance of international cooperation and professional networks: 80% of the survey respondents are members of the International Conference of Information Commissioners, the International Ombudsman Institute and the Network for Transparency and Access to Information [*Red de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información*].

[En français :]

L'UNESCO œuvre également pour le renforcement des capacités et le soutien aux réseaux, et pour la sensibilisation des parties prenantes à travers la célébration de journées dédiées, notamment la Journée internationale de l'accès universel à l'information, le 28 septembre.

Cette année, la Journée internationale a souligné l'importance des lois sur l'accès à l'information et de leur mise en œuvre pour « reconstruire en mieux » dans l'ère post-COVID-19 et pour améliorer la résilience de nos sociétés face aux crises. Nous avons également abordé le rôle essentiel de la coopération internationale dans le domaine de l'accès à l'information pour l'environnement, la santé et les droits humains.

Face au défi du changement climatique, nous appelons les pouvoirs publics travaillant sur les questions environnementales à s'inscrire dans cette dynamique. Davantage peut être fait pour assurer le suivi de leurs contributions afin d'assurer l'accès public à l'information, le traitement des demandes d'accès, ainsi que la divulgation proactive des informations. Nous sommes là pour les soutenir à cet égard.

Je vous remercie de votre attention et vous souhaite d'excellentes délibérations.