



Declaration of the Ambassador of Spain to the United Nations at the High-level segment of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (Geneva, 21 October 2021)

Esteemed Ministers, authorities, it is an honour for me to address you after the Seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention. I am certain that the analysis of relevant issues conducted during said session will lead to favourable repercussions for the future of the Convention and of our respective countries.

And now that 20 years have passed since the entry into force of the Convention, it is an opportune moment to take stock of, and analyse, the achievements made and the work that is yet to be done.

Without a doubt, through the combination of its three fundamental pillars—access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters—this Convention represents a significant step forward and a key advancement towards instating democracy in environmental matters, by promoting public participation in said three pillars, which underpin the Convention.

The Convention seeks to contribute to the protection of the right of present and future generations to live in an environment adequate to their health and well-being. To this end, it recognizes that States on their own cannot achieve those goals, and calls for public participation in order to fulfil those aims.

Thus, the States parties to the Convention avail themselves of the assistance of environmental protectors—individuals or NGOs—which supplement their public institutions in ensuring the preservation of the environment, requesting information, participating in decision-making, and submitting complaints to the competent authorities when they consider that environmental legislation has been violated. The Convention sets forth that people not only have rights, but also duties, both individually and in association with others, to protect and improve the environment for the benefit of present and future generations.

Our country, the Kingdom of Spain, ratified the Convention in December 2004, and it entered into force on 31 March 2005. Spain's Parliament subsequently approved Act 27/2006 of 18 July, regulating the rights to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters, aimed at guaranteeing the effective application of the Aarhus Convention throughout Spain.

Many achievements have been made in these 20 years in which the Convention has been active, but there is still a vast amount of work to be done in order to effectively implement the Convention in its different areas of action.



To achieve this, an essential prerequisite is ensuring that the content of the Convention and the rights and duties enshrined therein are widely known, because there is no doubt that to exercise rights and comply with duties it is necessary to be aware of them first. To this end we must endeavour to publicize the content of the Convention among our citizens, so that once they are aware of their rights and duties, they may strive to adapt their conduct to those requirements.

The rapid response mechanism, the forthcoming implementation of which has been analysed in this Seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties, will constitute, in our opinion, a valuable instrument to guarantee that persons exercising their rights under the Convention are not penalized, persecuted or harassed in any manner because of their participation. It will also be a means to guarantee the instatement of democracy in environmental matters and respect for human rights in those countries in which they may be called into question.

In our country, the Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenges—which is home to the Aarhus Convention National Focal Point—is the Ministry responsible for implementing, developing and disseminating the text of the Convention. It is assisted in this task by the regional Focal Points in Spain's respective Autonomous Communities, responding as appropriate to any communications regarding non-compliance with the Convention that may be sent to the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee.

This high-level segment concludes with the signature by all of us of the Geneva Declaration, a declaration that we welcome because it considers a wide array of environmental matters of concern to us, as well as establishing a clear roadmap which should enable us to address them properly.

Spain fully endorses the Geneva Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Development, aware of the importance that implementing major infrastructure and spatial planning entails for the economic development of nations and for the well-being of their inhabitants. The Aarhus Convention and its Protocol must guarantee that these necessary actions are compatible with the conservation of the environment.

Spain also welcomes the accession of Guinea-Bissau to the Aarhus Convention, and we are ready to offer our experience and collaboration to facilitate its full integration.

Lastly, Spain reaffirms its full commitment to the implementation, dissemination and development of the text of the Convention, in the conviction that it is an essential instrument for the conservation of the environment and of natural resources, through the effective instatement of democratic values in environmental matters.