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Economic Commission for Europe**Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on
Access to Information, Public Participation
in Decision-making and Access to Justice
in Environmental Matters****Working Group of the Parties****Twenty-sixth session**

Geneva, 22–23 June 2022

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

**Implementation of work programmes for 2018–2021
and for 2022–2025, including financial matters****Report on the implementation of the work programmes
for 2018–2021 and 2022–2025****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The present report was prepared pursuant to the decision 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 at its seventh session (Geneva, 18–21 October 2021) (see ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1, decision VII/5, annex I, item X).^a It provides an overview of the implementation of the work programme for the Convention for 2022–2025 for the reporting period of 1 January 2022 through 1 April 2022. Additionally, it provides an overview of the implementation of the work programme for the Convention for 2018–2021 for the reporting period of 1 September 2021 through 31 December 2021. The latter overview corresponds to the period following the report on the implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP/PP/2021/3), submitted to the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties.

^a See ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1, decision VII/5, annex I, item X. Available under “Post-session documents” tab at https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/Aarhus_Convention_MoP7

Introduction

1. The present report provides overviews of the implementation of the work programme for the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) for 2018–2021¹ as of 31 December 2021, and of the work programme of the Aarhus Convention for 2022–2025² as of 1 April 2022 (the reporting period). The former overview corresponds to the period following the report on the implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PP/2021/3), submitted to the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties (Geneva, 18–21 October 2021). An overview of contributions and expenditures in relation to the implementation of the work programme is provided in document ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2022/5. Only some activities related to access to information, capacity-building and awareness-raising regarding the Convention’s Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers are included; a comprehensive report on the implementation of the Protocol’s work programme for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PRTR/2021/8) was submitted to the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol for consideration at its fourth session (Geneva, 22 October 2021) and a similar report on the implementation of the Protocol’s work programme for 2022–2025 will be submitted to the next meeting of the Protocol’s Working Group of the Parties.

2. In implementing the work programme, the secretariat continued to make strenuous efforts to avoid duplication of work and inefficient use of resources by pursuing synergies with activities under other United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) multilateral environmental agreements, United Nations agencies and other partners. This required spending more time on the preparatory phase of activities to ensure proper consultations with the chairs of the respective subsidiary bodies and partner organizations. Furthermore, in the light of restrictions associated with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the secretariat continued to adjust to new methods of work by extending organization of meetings in online and hybrid formats and using more electronic tools. The organization of such meetings required the provision of additional training for staff to manage different information technology infrastructure and spending more time on the preparatory phase of activities to ensure proper consultations with delegations, the chairs of the respective subsidiary bodies and partner organizations, as well as liaising with conference services on numerous practical arrangements. Thus, arranging and servicing complex meetings in a hybrid or online format requires a high level of support by substantive and technical staff. In addition, there are a number of challenges associated with organizing such meetings. First, the unpredictability of the quality of the Internet connection and availability of the required equipment on the participants’ side, and other technical issues may have an impact on substantive discussions and procedures. Furthermore, the limited number of meeting rooms at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, that are equipped for servicing online or hybrid meetings posed an additional challenge in organizing those meetings. In future, it would be advisable to make decisions on holding such meetings based on the meetings’ purpose; for example, meetings of small expert groups or the Bureau are less challenging to organize in such formats than complex meetings requiring interpretation, negotiations and decision-making. Moreover, the required quality of information technology infrastructure and, when needed, the availability of interpretation for remote participation, are key preconditions for organizing meetings in a hybrid or online format.

I. Substantive issues

A. Access to information

3. During the reporting period, activities primarily focused on promoting the exchange of experience and identifying priority measures to improve public access to environmental

¹ See ECE/MP.PP/2017/2/Add.1, decision VI/5, annex I, item X.

² See ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1, decision VII/5, annex I, item X, available at https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/Aarhus_Convention_MoP7.

information, as required by articles 4 and 5 and other relevant provisions of the Aarhus Convention, including through electronic information tools, pursuant to decision VII/1.³ Those activities contributed to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular target 16.10 thereof (public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and other relevant international commitments.

4. The Updated recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.2) were adopted by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention through decision VII/1.⁴

5. The secretariat also continued to manage the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy,⁵ its databases, the PRTR.net global portal⁶ and the Convention's website.⁷ During the reporting period, the content of online tools was continuously updated; the tools are used to facilitate the collection, dissemination and exchange of information related to national implementation of the Convention, relevant global and regional developments regarding the application of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and on pollutant release and transfer registers. Parties were encouraged to continue to upload relevant news articles and resources and to provide the weblink to their national node.

6. The secretariat contributed to the work of other international forums or expert meetings organized by ECE subprogrammes and partner organizations dealing with access to environmental information and electronic information tools. It provided inputs related to: the development of a shared environmental information system; digital transformation and circular economy across the region; digitalization of national environmental information systems; and the integration of environmental information into e-government and open data frameworks and disaster risk reduction.

7. The secretariat has started preparations for a thematic session on access to information, to be held at the twenty-sixth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 22–23 June 2022). The thematic session will focus on advancing public access to environment-related product information, including on: (a) public access to product information and digitalization; (b) public access to product information and measures against greenwashing; and (c) means to encourage operators to inform the public (eco-labelling, eco-auditing, environmental, social and governance solutions). Subjects for discussion are based on decision VII/1 and the key outcomes of the work of the Task Force on Access to Information. The session's programme will be developed in close cooperation with the Chair of the Task Force on Access to Information. The session will be organized in the format of an interactive panel discussion followed by a general discussion.

8. A call for submitting information on national nodes for the Aarhus Clearinghouse and case studies on electronic information tools, which is posted on a dedicated web page and updated regularly,⁸ remains ongoing to facilitate sharing of experience, good practices and lessons learned.

B. Public participation in decision-making

9. During the reporting period, activities focused on promoting effective public participation in decision-making, as required by articles 6, 7 and 8 and other relevant provisions of the Convention, in line with decision VII/2.⁹ Activities contributed to furthering the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular target 16.7 thereof (responsive, inclusive,

³ ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1.

⁴ See https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/Aarhus_Convention_MoP7.

⁵ See <http://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/>.

⁶ See <https://prtr.unece.org/>.

⁷ See <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation>.

⁸ See <https://unece.org/env/pp/eit-case-studies>.

⁹ ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1.

participatory and representative decision-making at all levels) and other relevant international commitments.

10. The secretariat promoted the Convention's obligations regarding its second pillar at a workshop dedicated to the Maastricht Recommendations on Promoting Effective Public Participation in Decision-making in Environmental Matters (Yerevan, 26–27 January 2022), organized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment of Armenia.

11. The secretariat has started preparations for the tenth meeting of the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making, which is scheduled to take place in the second half of 2022 in line with decision VII/2.

12. A call for case studies on public participation in environmental decision-making was ongoing, with a view to the continued population of the Aarhus Clearinghouse Good Practice online database and sharing of experience, good practices and lessons learned.

C. Access to justice

13. During the reporting period, activities focused on promoting the exchange of experience to improve access to justice for members of the public in environmental matters, as required by article 9 and other relevant provisions of the Convention. The activities contributed to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals, in particular target 16.3 thereof (rule of law at the national and international levels and equal access to justice for all) and other relevant international commitments.

14. In line with decision VII/3,¹⁰ the secretariat has begun preparations for the fourteenth meeting of the Task Force on Access to Justice (Geneva, 27–28 April 2022).¹¹ The thematic sessions of the meeting will focus on access to justice in cases related to spatial planning and in energy-related cases. The Task Force is expected to identify current trends, good practices, barriers, challenges and innovative approaches in these areas. The delegates also will take stock of recent and upcoming developments regarding: public interest litigation and collective redress; standing; timeliness; and costs and access to assistance mechanisms. Furthermore, the Task Force also will consider tools to promote effective access to justice, such as: dissemination of information on access to review procedures, collection of relevant data and statistics and access to relevant case law using e-justice initiatives, modern digital technologies and other tools; specialization of judiciary and other legal professionals in environmental law; and measures to discourage strategic lawsuits against public participation.

15. The meeting will be preceded by a Judicial Colloquium entitled “Adjudication of cases related to climate change and air quality” (Geneva, 26–27 April 2022) for representatives of the judiciary, judicial training institutions and other review bodies.¹² This Colloquium will be convened by the secretariat in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in accordance with decision VII/3. The event will be organized in cooperation with the International Union for Conservation of Nature World Commission on Environmental Law, the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment, OSCE, the European Union Forum of Judges for the Environment and other partners. The aim of the event is to strengthen the capacity of the judiciary to effectively handle cases related to climate change and air quality, and to explore trends and good practices related to adjudication of these cases, in particular with regard to standing, scope of review and remedies.

16. The secretariat continued to populate the Aarhus Clearinghouse and the jurisprudence database with relevant resources; a call for case summaries is ongoing. The secretariat also contributed to the work of other international forums or expert meetings organized by partner

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/fourteenth-meeting-task-force-access-justice-under-aarhus-convention>.

¹² See <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/2022-judicial-colloquium>.

organizations dealing with access to justice. The secretariat promoted cooperation within the network of the judiciary, judicial training institutions and other review bodies in the pan-European region under the auspices of the Task Force and with the relevant networks in other regions.

D. Genetically modified organisms

17. Bilateral collaboration on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is ongoing between the secretariats of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Activities in this work area contributed to furthering a number of Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goals 15 and 16, and other relevant international commitments.

18. The *Pocket Guide promoting effective access to information and public participation regarding living modified organisms/genetically modified organisms*¹³ was developed by the two secretariats on the basis of experiences shared by Parties to the Cartagena Protocol and to the Aarhus Convention and by stakeholders. The Pocket Guide aims to strengthen capacities of Governments and stakeholders in providing effective access to information and public participation in decision-making processes. It is now available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

19. Both secretariats continuously promoted the use of e-learning modules, checklists and other tools developed jointly under the Aarhus Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity. A call for submitting useful resources to the Biosafety Clearing-House and the Aarhus Clearinghouse remains ongoing, with a view to continued sharing of experience, good practices and lessons learned.

20. During the reporting period, no additional Parties ratified the amendment to the Aarhus Convention on public participation in decisions on the deliberate release into the environment and placing on the market of genetically modified organisms (GMO amendment). One more Party from the following list must ratify the amendment for it to enter into force: Armenia; Azerbaijan; Belarus; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; North Macedonia; Tajikistan; Turkmenistan; and Ukraine.

21. Those Parties whose ratification of the GMO amendment would count towards its entry into force have repeatedly been called upon during the previous and the current intersessional periods to take specific steps towards ratification and to provide the secretariat with a written explanation of the status of ratification. Following the request of the Meeting of the Parties at its seventh session,¹⁴ the Working Group of the Parties will closely monitor progress towards the entry into force of the GMO amendment.

II. Procedures and mechanisms

A. Compliance mechanism

22. The Compliance Committee held three regular meetings in the reporting period, namely, its seventy-second, seventy-third and seventy-fourth meetings. The seventy-second meeting was held in-person in Geneva in parallel with the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties. The seventy-third and seventy-fourth meetings were held on 13–16 December 2021 and 15–18 March 2022, respectively.¹⁵ Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, both the seventy-third and seventy-fourth meetings were held fully online. At its meetings, the Committee, inter alia, reviewed communications from the public concerning alleged non-compliance by Parties. Since the Committee's report to the seventh session of the Meeting

¹³ See <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/gmos>.

¹⁴ ECE/MP.PP/2021/2, para. 34, available at https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/Aarhus_Convention_MoP7.

¹⁵ See Compliance Committee meeting reports, available at <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/aarhus-convention/compliance-committee-meetings>.

of the Parties, five new communications have been forwarded to the Committee for consideration as to their preliminary admissibility. Two of those communications were determined to be admissible and two were determined to be inadmissible. The Committee postponed its determination of the preliminary admissibility of one communication to its seventy-fifth meeting (Geneva, 14–17 June 2022). As at the end of the reporting period, the Committee had thirty-four pending communications. The Committee received no new submissions from Parties and the secretariat made no referrals in the reporting period.

23. In addition to its pending cases, the Committee followed up on the implementation of 19 decisions adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its seventh session, namely decisions VII/8a–s concerning, respectively, Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, Czechia, the European Union, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Spain, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.¹⁶ In this regard, the Committee adopted its report on the implementation of paragraph 7 of decision VII/8c concerning the compliance of Belarus on 22 February 2022, which was thereafter sent to the parties and posted on the website. The Committee found that, since the Party concerned did not notify the secretariat that it had cancelled Ecohome’s liquidation and reinstated Ecohome’s registration as a public association under the Act of Public Associations by 1 December 2021, the suspension of the special rights and privileges accorded to the Party concerned under the Convention issued to the Party concerned through paragraph 7 (a) of decision VII/8c became effective on 1 February 2022.¹⁷

24. As well as its follow-up on the implementation of the decisions adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its seventh session, the Committee also followed up on two requests made by the Meeting of the Parties at its seventh session concerning the compliance of the European Union¹⁸ and the Republic of Moldova.¹⁹

25. Activities in this work area contributed to furthering a number of Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 16, and other relevant international commitments.

B. Rapid response mechanism to deal with cases related to article 3 (8) of the Convention

26. Pursuant to decision VII/9 on the establishment of a rapid response mechanism to deal with cases related to article 3 (8) of the Convention (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1) adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its seventh session, the secretariat is preparing the third extraordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties to elect the Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders. The extraordinary session is expected to be held back-to-back with the twenty-sixth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties in Geneva on 23–24 June 2022.

27. In preparation for the extraordinary session, the secretariat opened the call for nominations for candidates for the election of the Special Rapporteur. The deadline for nominations was 30 March 2022. On 6 April 2022, the secretariat distributed the nominations to Parties and to other States, organizations and bodies referred to in rule 6 of the Convention’s Rules of Procedure at least six weeks before the opening of the third extraordinary session.²⁰

28. A round table on environmental defenders will be held during the extraordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties in the format of keynote statements and interventions by the representatives of Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders followed by a general discussion.

¹⁶ Available at <https://unece.org/env/pp/cc/documents>.

¹⁷ See <https://unece.org/env/pp/cc/decision-vii8c-concerning-belarus>.

¹⁸ Request ACCC/M/2021/4 (European Union) (see ECE/MP.PP/2021/2, para. 58).

¹⁹ Request ACCC/M/2021/5 (Republic of Moldova) (see ECE/MP.PP/2021/2, para. 45).

²⁰ See <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/call-nominations-candidates-election-aarhus-convention>.

29. The secretariat continued to populate the Aarhus Clearinghouse with relevant resources dedicated to the protection of environmental defenders.

30. Activities in this work area contributed to furthering Sustainable Development Goals, in particular target 16.10 thereof (protection of fundamental freedoms), and other relevant international commitments.

C. Capacity-building activities

31. In addition to capacity-building activities mentioned under other areas of work to build synergies and enhance coordination with partners, the secretariat continuously maintained close cooperation with and provided advisory support to United Nations partner agencies and other international organizations within the Convention capacity-building coordination framework.²¹

32. The secretariat promoted the Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers at the 2021 Aarhus Centres Annual Meeting, organized by OSCE (Vienna (online), 23–24 September 2021). The meeting focused on good practices and ongoing activities of Aarhus Centres in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, women’s empowerment through the work of the Aarhus Centres, and the role of the Aarhus Centres in times of disaster and in green recovery. Ensuring sustainable functioning of the Aarhus Centres through resource mobilization remained crucial.

33. During the reporting period, the secretariat provided various inputs to the processes under the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework²² covering activities from 2021 to 2027 in 16 countries in the ECE region.

34. During the reporting period, the secretariat continuously provided advisory support to Parties and non-Parties upon request. It liaised continuously with partner organizations, potential donors and interested countries and stakeholders on possible capacity-building activities and handled a number of consultations regarding capacity-building activities through electronic means. Following the expression of interest by Uzbekistan in learning from the experience of implementing the Convention, the secretariat continued to explore possibilities for providing advisory support and capacity-building to the country’s authorities.

D. Reporting mechanism

35. Following the failure of Azerbaijan, Malta, the Netherlands, the Republic of Moldova, and Tajikistan to submit their national implementation reports for the 2021 reporting cycle within the deadlines set by the Meeting of the Parties, these Parties were invited by the Meeting of the Parties to submit their reports by 1 December 2021. Three of these five countries subsequently submitted their reports (i.e.: Azerbaijan, on 19 October 2021; Malta, on 11 November 2021; and the Republic of Moldova, on 2 December 2021). As of 1 April 2022, only the Netherlands and Tajikistan had failed to submit their national implementation reports for the 2021 reporting cycle.²³ All 2021 national implementation reports submitted to date are available in the online reporting tool.²⁴ The Republic of Moldova was the only country that failed to submit its report for the previous reporting cycle.

36. The secretariat continued providing advice to the Parties and organizations regarding the reporting process and the online reporting tool.

²¹ See <https://unece.org/env/pp/aarhus-convention-capacity-building>.

²² See <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/cooperation-framework>.

²³ See <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/aarhus-convention-reporting-mechanism/2021-reporting-cycle>.

²⁴ See <https://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/national-reports/reports>.

III. Promotional activities

A. Awareness-raising and promotion of the Convention and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers

37. The secretariat, or relevant experts invited by the secretariat to do so, participated in conferences, seminars, workshops and other events in various countries to promote and raise awareness about the Convention and its Protocol at different events. Below is a non-exhaustive list of the events.

38. During the reporting period, the secretariat participated in the three following side events organized on the margins of the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to promote and raise awareness about the Convention and its Protocol: “Guaranteeing Aarhus-protected Rights in International Climate Governance”, organized by the Centre for International Environmental Law and held on 11 October 2021; “Welcome Guinea-Bissau: opening a new dimension for Aarhus”, organized by Earthjustice, the Geneva Environment Network and the European ECO-Forum and held on 15 October 2021; and “Cooperation between the Aarhus Convention and the Escazú Agreement to promote the protection of access rights and of environmental defenders”, organized by the Guta Association, the Centre for International Environmental Law, Earthjustice, EarthRights, the European Environmental Bureau and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and held on 15 October 2021.

39. The secretariat promoted relevant provisions of the Convention in the preparations for the upcoming Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022). It also promoted the relevant outcomes of the Joint High-level Segment of the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties at the seminar on sustainable infrastructure held during the tenth meeting of the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment within the framework of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (Geneva, 1–3 December 2021).²⁵

40. The secretariat promoted the Convention and its Protocol through various reports and articles prepared under the auspices of ECE and partner organizations. It continued an enhanced outreach exercise, distributing materials on the Convention and the Protocol to national focal points, Aarhus Centres, other United Nations bodies, international organizations, NGOs and academic institutions in the ECE region and beyond.

B. Promotion of the principles of the Aarhus Convention in international forums and other interlinkages with relevant international bodies and processes

41. In connection with implementing the Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums (Almaty Guidelines),²⁶ at its twenty-sixth meeting, the Working Group of the Parties will hold a thematic session on promoting the application of the principles of the Convention in international forums. The session will focus on legally binding instruments on: (a) plastics (e.g., with regard to the marine environment and air pollution); and (b) business and human rights, covering States’ obligations with regard to the responsibility of business actors under their jurisdiction. Additional topics will include updates on subjects considered by the Working Group of the Parties at its twenty-fifth meeting (Geneva, 3 May and 7–8 June 2021), namely, promotion of the principles of the Convention in processes under the Convention on Biological Diversity, with the focus on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, and in international forums in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The thematic session will be

²⁵ <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/events/350793>.

²⁶ ECE/MP.PP/2005/2/Add.5, annex.

organized in a format of panel presentations and round table discussion on selected subjects in line with decision VII/4.²⁷

42. During the reporting period, the secretariat promoted the Convention principles in a briefing organized by the Centre for International Environmental Law and La Ruta del Clima, held on 4 November 2021 at the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Glasgow, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 31 October–12 November 2021). The briefing served to raise awareness of the principles of the Aarhus Convention and the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement) among delegates.

43. The secretariat continued to support efforts to promote the principles of the Aarhus Convention in various international forums, working with other United Nations bodies (in particular, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, UNEP, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals and the UNEP Action Plan for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Sustainable Development of the Coastal Areas of the Mediterranean (UNEP/MAP) Coordinating Unit), other environmental treaty bodies (such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention), the Minamata Convention on Mercury, the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes) and other international organizations (e.g., the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Court of Human Rights, the European Investment Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), OSCE, the Council of Europe, the Group on Earth Observations and the World Bank).

44. Within the United Nations Environment Management Group, the secretariat acted as focal point for ECE in the Issue Management Group on Human Rights and the Environment.

45. The secretariat continued to promote the use of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol in the context of the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and cooperation with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

46. With regard to pollutant release and transfer registers and chemicals and wastes management, the secretariat promoted the work under the Convention and its interlinkages with other treaties and processes, among other things, at the following events:

(a) The fifth meeting of the OECD Working Party on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, held on 26–28 January 2022, the OECD Working Party on PRTRs subgroup on Data Use, and the OECD Working Party on PRTRs mid-year teleconference, held virtually on 3 September 2021 and 29 September 2021, respectively;

(b) The side events to the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers on “Enhancement of Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) in the Western Balkan countries and the Republic of Moldova”, organized by Participatio on 11 October 2021, and “PRTRs: the evidence base instrument for the right to know our environment?”, co-organized by Geneva Environment Network, Earthjustice and the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes on 14 October 2021;

²⁷ ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1.

(c) The first and second meetings of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals indicators project working group on 11 January 2022 and 3 February 2022, respectively.

47. Furthermore, the secretariat organized the fourteenth meeting of the International PRTR Coordinating Group (online, 26 January 2022). It also participated in the following PRTR-related meetings:

(a) From Data to Environmental Action, Global Resource Information Database-Geneva Science Day, organized with the support of the Geneva Environment Network, held on 17 November 2021;

(b) “UN System Response to Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution, Geneva Beat Plastic Pollution Dialogues”, organized as a partnership between the United Nations Environment Management Group, the Geneva Beat Plastic Pollution Dialogues and Global Resource Information Database-Arendal, held on 13 January 2022;

(c) “Women, leadership, chemical safety and the SDGs”, co-organized by the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management secretariat, UNEP and the International Pollutants Elimination Network, held on 13 January 2022.

48. The secretariat provides advice on an ongoing basis to various academic bodies, NGOs and other stakeholders upon request.

C. Coordination and oversight of intersessional activities

49. During the reporting period, the secretariat carried out preparations for, serviced and promoted outcomes of the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention, which took place back-to-back with the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol in Geneva, during the week of 18–22 October 2021. Marking the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Aarhus Convention, the events provided a platform for Parties, signatories, international organizations, civil society and other stakeholders to discuss achievements and challenges in promoting environmental democracy, digital transformation and sustainable development. Two sessions featured a Joint High-level Segment, where delegations focused on the role of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol in furthering sustainable infrastructure and spatial planning and which resulted in a number of outcomes. Parties to both treaties and a wide range of stakeholders adopted the Geneva Declaration on Environmental Democracy for Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Development. The Meeting of the Parties to the Convention also adopted respective decisions setting out priorities for future work by 2025 to advance the implementation of and compliance with the Convention. The secretariat coordinated the organization of 15 side events held online prior to the sessions.

50. The Meeting of the Parties approved the accession of Guinea-Bissau to the Convention. The status of the Convention with regard to accession, ratification or approval remained unchanged:²⁸ as of 1 April 2022, the Convention had 47 Parties. The GMO amendment has 32 Parties to date. The Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers has been ratified by 38 Parties.

51. Coordination and oversight of intersessional activities during the reporting period were conducted by the Bureau,²⁹ which regularly held electronic consultations and decision-making through electronic means. The Bureau also held its forty-ninth meeting on 10 March 2022 in a hybrid format.

²⁸ The deposit of the instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession by Guinea-Bissau is pending.

²⁹ See <https://unece.org/env/pp/aarhus-convention-bureau>.

52. The secretariat has been carrying out preparations for the twenty-sixth session of the Working Group of the Parties to the Convention,³⁰ as well as the third extraordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties, to be held back-to-back in Geneva on 22–24 June 2022.

³⁰ See <https://unece.org/env/pp/wgp>.