

## Aarhus Convention – 26<sup>th</sup> Working Group of the Parties, 22 June 2022

### Agenda item 1 – European ECO Forum opening statement

**Francesca Carlsson, European Environmental Bureau**

Agenda item 1 – opening statement of NGOs European ECO Forum: Francesca Carlsson, EEB

Dear Chair, dear delegates, dear colleagues,

As we all know, this 26th session of the Working Group of the Parties distinguishes itself from other former such meetings, as it is taking place while one of the Aarhus Parties, its people, and its environment, are subject to aggression by Russia. The European ECO Forum stands in solidarity with Ukraine, its civil society, and all those affected by this aggression in these unimaginable and horrific times. Political activists in civil society in Ukraine, including environmental activists, face particular risks. While the participation of our Ukrainian colleagues at this meeting have been made extremely challenging if not impossible, we have done our best – whenever we could – to reflect their views in preparation to this meeting.

Another distinguishing feature of this Working Group of the Parties meeting is that it is being held back-to-back with an extraordinary Meeting of the Parties for the election of the Special Rapporteur under the Rapid Response Mechanism, as decided at MoP 7 in October last year. This is a unique and historical moment for the Aarhus Convention, as well as for the protection of environmental defenders in the whole region.

The need to protect environmental defenders exercising their rights under this Convention, is fundamental to the functioning of the entire Convention. For this reason, it will be important for the Task Forces and the work of all pillars to take into account the situation of environmental defenders and to cooperate and engage with the new Special Rapporteur once appointed.

On a last point, we take this opportunity to highlight the recent discussions and the initiative for a new protocol on the right to a healthy environment under the European Convention on Human Rights. NGOs welcome and support this initiative as it complements Article 1 of the Aarhus Convention, which implicitly recognises this right already. We therefore urge all Aarhus Parties to continue to deliver on the rights and obligations under this Convention while also supporting the initiative on the right to a healthy environment.



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