

## Item 4(c) Capacity Building and Awareness Raising

Intervention by Anna Clara Botto, Youth and Environment Europe at the 26th Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention.

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Thank you Chair for the floor. I am Clara and I speak on behalf of Youth and Environment Europe.

I would like to draw attention to the fact that we cannot talk about the success of the three pillars of the Convention if we do not include young people in it. And that stands for several reasons. If we are trying to secure the “right of every person of present and future generations to live in an environment adequate to health and well being”, how can we do so if young people are not aware that they have this right? And furthermore, faced with the challenges the socio-climatic crisis is expected to bring, how are they to thrive in the future if they are not being prepared to do so, in the different areas of expertise they pertain to?

If we do not account for internet usage inequalities, we usually assume that young people have access to environmental information because of search engines and social media, for example. But does that mean that they are fully aware of what awaits them or the tools they need to have in order to implement the systemic changes that we as a society so direly need? Access to information is not enough, it also matters how they process and what they do with the information that is available to them.

Thus the importance of capacity-building and awareness raising. Youth organizations have been trying to fill the gap that governmental agencies and the educational system leave, taking the lead on building capacity and raising awareness on environmental related rights. Considering the complexity of environmental law, at Youth and Environment Europe for example we aim to create opportunities for young people with or without a legal background to increase their understanding of it, to exchange experiences and eventually make use of legal tools themselves. Our campaign Lights on Aarhus for instance shed light on the importance of the Convention and made it easier for young people to comprehend it.

However, youth organizations should not be the sole responsible actors in raising awareness and bridging this gap. Hearing words of appreciation that are not followed by practical support, like funding and a real seat at the decision making tables, do not bring us anywhere. Again, just as we said last October in the 7th MOP, we believe there is a lack of youth's voices in environmental decision-making processes, highly evident by the fact that we are still the only youth organization present here in this working group. This is not enough, and this underrepresentation is highly in contrast with the goal of the Convention of leaving a better world for future generations.

The parties here present must also be committed to educate younger generations on sustainable development matters and to support youth organizations, so that we move from a passive to active role in environmental policymaking. After all, we are the generation who is said to suffer the most in the coming years with the climate crisis, so logically we should be well aware and well capacitated to face it and tackle it.

Thank you.