

ENVIRONMENT



2022 HIGHLIGHTS

Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs

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The war against Ukraine and environmental defenders

- The [Bureau](#) and the [Compliance Committee](#) of the Aarhus Convention issued letters expressing their concerns about protection of environmental defenders affected by the war against Ukraine launched by the Russian Federation and calling on Parties to the Convention to do all possible within their means to fulfil their obligations under article 3 (8) of the Convention.





Protocol on PRTRs Compliance Committee assisted Parties to advance their legislative frameworks and improve reporting on Protocol's implementation

At its twelfth meeting, the Compliance Committee reviewed different aspects of national pollutant release and transfer registers in the European Union member States aimed at providing advice to Parties concerned and agreed to identify possible improvements required for the upcoming fourth reporting cycle and for the preparation of the respective synthesis report.



- [Twelfth meeting of the Protocol on PRTRs Compliance Committee](#) | 1-2 March 2022, Geneva (online)



Enabling effective access to justice

Two events to further effective access to justice in environmental matters were held under the Aarhus Convention: Judicial Colloquium and fourteenth meeting of the Task Force on Access to Justice

- The Judicial Colloquium “Adjudication of cases related to climate change and air quality” brought together high-level representatives of judiciary, judicial training institutions and other review bodies with the aim of **strengthening capacity of judiciary to effectively handle cases related to climate change and air quality** and explore trends and good practices related to adjudication of these cases, in particular about standing, scope of review and remedies.
- Moreover, the Judicial Colloquium considered the **role of the Aarhus Convention along with the other relevant international legal frameworks in the context of achieving Sustainable Development Goals**, namely Sustainable Development Goal 16 and its target 16.3 (*Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all*).
- The meeting of the Task Force served as a platform for exchanging information, experiences and good practices on key recent developments in the implementation of the Convention’s pillar on access to justice, focusing on the cases related to spatial planning and energy-related cases.
- Additionally, the Task Force considered tools to promote effective access to justice and possible steps in addressing obstacles hampering its implementation. The meeting is expected to contribute to countries’ efforts in achieving Sustainable Development Goals, namely Sustainable Development Goal 16 and its target 16.3 (*Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all*).

[2022 Judicial Colloquium](#) | 26 - 27 April 2022, Geneva

[Fourteenth meeting of the Task Force on Access to Justice](#) |

27 - 28 April 2022, Geneva





Aarhus Parties reaffirmed their commitment to protect the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

- At its twenty-sixth meeting, the Working Group of the Parties held two thematic sessions, focusing on advancing access to environment-related product information and on promoting environmental democracy in international processes on plastics and business and human rights.
- Progress in implementing the current work programme and in promoting access to information, public participation and access to justice, as well as in ratification of the Convention's amendment on genetically modified organisms were covered at the meeting. Other items were also reviewed such as financial matters, promotion of the Convention and relevant developments and interlinkages.



Please [see](#) the article covering this event.

Aarhus Parties reaffirmed their commitment to protect the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

Last week, Parties to the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) gathered alongside representatives of civil society, international organizations, academia, private organizations and other key stakeholders to take stock of progress and promote environmental democracy, taking a number of commitments at the [third extraordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties \(ExMoP3\)](#) and [twenty-sixth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties \(WGP26\)](#).

The meetings were held back-to-back in Geneva from 22-24 June 2022. ExMoP3 featured the election of the Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders and a corresponding Round Table, while WGP26 featured thematic sessions on access to information and on promoting the principles of the Convention in international forums.



- [Twenty-sixth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#) | 22 - 23 June 2022, Geneva



Election of the world's first Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders

- At its third extraordinary session, the Meeting of the Parties focused its attention on the protection of environmental defenders, culminating in the landmark election of Mr. Michel Forst as Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders under the Aarhus Convention. The Special Rapporteur's mandate is to provide a rapid response mechanism to protect environmental defenders facing persecution, penalization or harassment for exercising their rights under the Convention. This is an important step for the advancement of environmental democracy and the first international mechanism specifically safeguarding environmental defenders established within a legally binding framework either under the United Nations system or other intergovernmental structure.
- To help inform the work of the Special Rapporteur, the event featured a Round Table on Environmental Defenders, which invited environmental defenders, Parties to the Aarhus Convention and international organizations to discuss the main trends, challenges and good practices with regard to the protection of environmental defenders in the region and beyond.



Please [see](#) the article covering this event.

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- [The third extraordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention](#) | 23 - 24 June 2022, Geneva



Decision of Belarus to withdraw from the Aarhus Convention

The Bureau of the Aarhus Convention issued a [letter](#) expressing its deep regret upon being notified that Belarus decided to withdraw from the Aarhus Convention.





Furthering the right to a healthy environment through effective public participation in decision-making

- The meeting of the Task Force on Public participation in Decision-making gathered together representatives of States, youth, international and non-governmental organizations, Aarhus Centres, international financial institutions, academia and other stakeholders, who focused on discussing public participation in decision-making in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and on health-related issues linked to air pollution and on urban development.
- Moreover, it was remarked that despite significant efforts by the Governments and civil society to improve legislation and practices to promote public participation, there are still numerous challenges in place. Besides the wars and other forms of military offensives along with natural disasters, inevitably have a negative impact on public participation in decision-making, and thus it is highly important to safeguard effective procedures in recovery and reconstruction plans.



Please see the [photos](#) of the meeting and the [news piece](#).

Furthering the right to a healthy environment through effective public participation in decision-making

[Covid-19](#) [Environment](#) [Sustainable Development](#) [SDGs](#) [Aarhus Convention](#)

04 November 2022

The tenth meeting of the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making under the Aarhus Convention (Geneva hybrid), 10-11 October 2022) focused on effective public participation in decision-making in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and on health-related issues linked to air pollution and on urban development.



The right to live in a healthy environment is rooted in the Aarhus Convention and is directly linked to the universal right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment – as recently recognized by the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly. The topics considered by the Task Force were therefore very timely.

It was demonstrated that, despite significant efforts by Governments and civil society to improve legislation and practice to promote public participation, numerous challenges remain. Those challenges need to be addressed, for example, by strengthening the capacity of public authorities to implement procedures; mitigating existing logistical and administrative barriers for youth; and adapting public participation modalities to cater to the needs of different target groups, in particular, those in vulnerable situations, such as women, the elderly and indigenous communities. Moreover, it was stressed that wars and other forms of military offensives along with natural disasters, inevitably have a negative impact on public participation; thus Governments need to safeguard effective procedures in recovery and reconstruction plans.

- [Tenth meeting of the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making under the Aarhus Convention](#) | 10 - 11 October 2022, Geneva (online)



World's first Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders presents his vision for the mandate

- Mr. Michel Forst, the [Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders](#), held an online meeting with Parties and stakeholders to present his vision for his mandate, which was established through [decision VII/9](#) of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention to provide a rapid response mechanism to deal with cases related to article 3 (8) of the Convention.
- “Environmental defenders continue to be exposed to significant risks of penalisation, persecution, harassment and even killings. And these risks do not spare the geographical area of the Aarhus Convention, where environmental defenders are facing reprisals, a shrinking civic space, restrictive legal frameworks and strong attacks from companies”, warned Mr. Forst.
- The meeting was attended by a large number of Parties to the Convention, interested stakeholders and other UN Member States and included a very interactive question-and-answer session between participants and the Special Rapporteur.



Please see [statement](#) of the Special Rapporteur and the [press release](#) on the meeting.



UN Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders presents his vision for mandate to ensure protection under the Aarhus Convention

Climate Change | Environment | Sustainable Development | SDGs | Aarhus Convention

24 November 2022

“Environmental defenders continue to be exposed to significant risks of penalisation, persecution, harassment and even killings. And these risks do not spare the geographical area of the Aarhus Convention, where environmental defenders are facing reprisals, a shrinking civic space, restrictive legal frameworks and strong attacks from companies”, warned the Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention, Mr. Michel Forst, as he met with Parties to the Aarhus Convention, other Member States, civil society and international partners on 23 November 2022 to present his vision for implementing the mandate following his election in June 2022.



- [Meeting of the Aarhus Convention Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders](#) | 23 November 2022, Geneva (online)



Sharing perspectives on PRTR systems as tools for effective environmental management, for supporting access to information on plastic pollution and for promoting green and circular economy

- At the ninth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs, Parties, other member States and stakeholders from different regions shared their experiences in implementing PRTRs, for the first time touching upon the role of PRTRs in supporting access to information on plastic pollution.
- They also discussed a number of subjects relevant to the promotion of a green and circular economy, including: harmonized data collection and dissemination standards for pollutants; reporting data on production volume and resource consumption; comparability of PRTR data by the public, industry and policymakers; and coordination of major organizations and instruments dealing with chemicals management at the international level.



Please see [photos](#) and the [news piece](#) on the event.

UNECE Protocol on PRTRs: supporting access to information on plastic pollution and promoting green and circular economy

[Circular Economy](#) | [Environment](#) | [Sustainable Development](#) | [SDGs](#)
[Aarhus Convention](#) | [Protocol on PRTRs](#)

14 December 2022

The UNECE Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) continues to support actions to promote transparency in environmental matters across the globe. It drives the development of national legislation and practice towards a common set of international standards, bringing about positive changes that would otherwise not occur. Given complex global production and supply chains, adherence to such standards for PRTR registers can help reduce pollutant releases and promote a green and circular economy.



- [Ninth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs](#) | 24 - 25 November 2022, Geneva (online)



Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee holds open sessions to assist Parties with their plans of action

In 2022, the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee held open sessions at its seventy-fourth (15-18 March 2022) and seventy-seventh (13-16 December 2022) meetings to assist Parties subject to a decision of the Meeting of the Parties. At its seventy-seventh meeting, the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee invited fourteen Parties to attend open sessions at which the Committee provided its views on the plans of actions those Parties had been requested by the Meeting of the Parties to submit by 1 July 2022. It is the first time that the Meeting of the Parties has requested Parties subject to a decision of non-compliance to submit a plan of action, including a time schedule, regarding their implementation of the recommendations in that decision. These open sessions aimed to assist Parties subject to decisions of non-compliance to implement the recommendations in the decision concerning their non-compliance in an effective and timely manner. The sessions were interactive and collaborative and demonstrated a high level of engagement by the Parties concerned, communicants and observers.

- Please see the full list of the meetings [here](#).



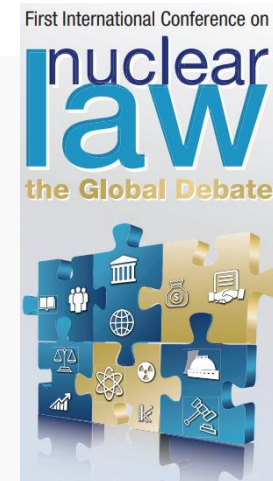


Promoting the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs

The secretariat promoted the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs at numerous events. This included, the International Atomic Energy Agency's [First International Conference on Nuclear Law: The Global Debate](#) (Vienna, 25–29 April 2022). The presentation aimed to assist Governments and a wide range of stakeholders to promote transparency, effective public participation and access to justice in nuclear matters. At the conference, more than 900 lawyers, representatives of national authorities, international organizations, nuclear industry and civil society from 127 countries met to discuss emerging issues and trends in nuclear law and the applicable legal frameworks.

On 20 December 2022, UNECE held an online [Youth Dialogue: Shaping the Future of the Region](#) which focused on a selection of key issues related to UNECE's work and which are of relevance for young people. Inputs were provided regarding importance of effective access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice for young people, as enshrined in the Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs.

The secretariat also promoted synergy on PRTRs at numerous events held under the auspices of other organisations, including the OECD Working Party on PRTRs, the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals and the Minamata Convention Expert Group on Mercury Releases. Furthermore, it promoted the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol through various reports and articles prepared under the auspices of ECE and partner organizations..





2022 HIGHLIGHTS | Aarhus Convention & its Protocol on PRTRs



The Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs proved to be instrumental in addressing the current challenges faced in the world, including energy system transformation, transition towards green economy and infrastructure, promoting innovation, fighting the corruption, responding to COVID-19 and safeguarding environmental defenders. Due to their cross-cutting nature, they also help to achieve a number of Sustainable Development Goals.



**Thank you for all your efforts that helped
to promote transparency, better
decision-making and the rule of law
for the benefit of people and nature!**

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