



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 meeting
 Geneva, 22–23 June 2022

**Report of the Working Group of the Parties on its
 twenty-sixth meeting**
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I. Introduction

1. The twenty-sixth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) was held in Geneva, from 22 to 23 June 2022.

2. The meeting focused on the review of the implementation of the work programme for the Convention for 2022–2025 (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1, decision VII/5, annex I, item X), as well as of the implementation of the work programme for the Convention for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PP/2017/2/Add.1, decision VI/5, annex I) for the period 1 September–31 December 2021. The latter 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). The meeting also included thematic sessions on access to information in decision-making and on promoting the principles of the Convention in international forums. The Working Group considered relevant subsections of the report on the implementation of the work programmes for 2018–2021 and 2022–2025 (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2022/4) for each corresponding agenda item.

A. Attendance

3. The meeting was attended by delegations from the following Parties to the Convention: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, European Union, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

4. Delegates from Guinea-Bissau and Uzbekistan were also present.

5. The meeting was also attended by representatives of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Trade Centre, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Environment Agency, Aarhus Centres, judiciary and academic organizations. Furthermore, representatives of international, regional and national environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) participated in the meeting, many of whom coordinated their input within the framework of the European ECO-Forum.

B. Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda

6. The Chair opened the meeting, reflecting that the gathering was taking place at a difficult time for the ECE region as a result of the military offensive carried out by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which was devastating for people's lives, human rights and the environment, and was directly undermining the Aarhus Convention.

7. He recalled that the aim of the meeting, which was taking place back-to-back with the third extraordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties, was to review progress in implementing the work programme of the Convention, as laid out in decision VII/5 (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1), adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its seventh session. Furthermore, he recalled that the meeting would feature thematic sessions on access to information and on promoting the principles of the Convention in international forums.

8. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the Chair and of the statements made by the representative of the European Union and its member States and by the representative of the European ECO-Forum highlighting the gravity of the situation in

the region linked to the war in Ukraine launched by the Russian Federation, and adopted the provisional agenda of the meeting (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2022/1).¹

II. Status of ratification

9. The secretariat reported on the status of ratification of the Convention, the amendment to the Convention on public participation in decisions on the deliberate release into the environment and placing on the market of genetically modified organisms (GMO amendment), and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs). At the time of the meeting, the status of ratification remained unchanged since the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties: there were 47 Parties to the Convention, 32 Parties to the GMO amendment and 38 Parties to the Protocol. One more Party from among the following list must ratify the GMO amendment for it to enter into force: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine.

10. The Working Group took note of the information on the status of ratification of the Convention, its GMO amendment and the Protocol provided by the secretariat.

III. Substantive issues

A. Thematic session on access to information

11. The session was chaired by Ms. Iordanca-Rodica Iordanov (Chair, Task Force on Access to Information). The Working Group focused the discussion on advancing public access to environment-related product information, in accordance with article 5 (6) and (8) of the Convention. In particular, the participants discussed: (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).

12. A representative of the European Environment Agency, giving the keynote presentation, underscored the importance of public access to environment-related product information for progressing digitalization and circular economy transformation. To advance the European Green Deal and other relevant transformation initiatives, the Agency and the European Environment Information and Observation Network had aligned their strategic objectives to support the implementation of those initiatives, build stronger networks and partnerships, make full use of data, technology and digitalization and resources in order to achieve shared ambitions across 38 countries. In particular to promote public access to product information as envisaged in the Convention’s recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.2), the Agency focused on implementing the European Environment Information and Observation Network digitalization framework, supporting circular economy monitoring, piloting 19 digital product passports, and assessing activities related to textiles and electronics. The European Union Circular Economy Action Plan² would introduce further measures requiring improved environmental information management that could lead to better eco-design and sustainable products, sustainable and circular textiles, pollution prevention from large industrial installations and update of the European Pollutant Release and Transfer Register to the European Industrial Emissions Portal,³ substantiating green claims made by business and reducing “greenwashing”. Digital product passports, based on unique product identifiers with

¹ Text of statements, as made available to the secretariat by speakers, have been uploaded to the meeting web page, along with a list of participants and documents for the meeting: <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/Public-Participation/events/365937>.

² See https://op.europa.eu/de/publication-detail/-/publication/45cc30f6-cd57-11ea-adf7-01aa75ed71a1/language-en?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIofmziMKq-IVGYfVCh3QYgwHEAAYASAAEgKp9fd_BwE.

³ See <https://industry.eea.europa.eu/explore>.

basic information using modern digital technologies, could be instrumental in supporting those measures but would require internationally agreed standards and protocols.

13. The Chair then invited the panellists to share experiences, challenges and lessons learned in advancing access to environmental-related product information.

14. A representative of Finland outlined measures to strengthen public access to product information in support of the country's carbon-neutral and digital circular economy transition. Those measures had been implemented in accordance with the European Green Deal, the European Union Circular Economy Action Plan and the country's new Circular Economy Strategy and the Resolution on Promoting Circular Economy. In particular, the Resolution set out targets and caps on consumption of natural resources and required, among other things: (a) the compilation of information on circular economy services for citizens (e.g., repair and resale services); (b) the opening up and interlinking of material and data flows; (c) the creation of a sustainable circular economy market; and (d) the incorporation of expertise in circular economy into the education system and work/life skills. Further measures to inform consumers focused on: (a) the Common Market, by harmonizing the relevant national framework regarding product eco-design, specific substances, mandatory energy labelling and methodology for the calculation of the environmental footprint of products and organizations; (b) the use of voluntary eco-labelling schemes, for example the Nordic Swan Ecolabel; and (c) partnerships such as the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra⁴ to carry out projects to promote sustainability solutions, fair data economy, democracy and participation using the returns from capital originally granted by the Finnish Parliament.

15. A representative of Serbia shared experiences in informing consumers about the environmental impact of products and business activities, in particular through pollutant release and transfer registers and eco-labelling. Serbia had introduced a national voluntary Type I environmental labelling scheme,⁵ had established a special commission to permit and monitor its use, and had defined conditions and procedure for obtaining the right to use the eco-label, its elements, design and use. The Serbian eco-label covered 26 product groups based on 26 criteria and could be awarded only to products made in the country, except for food and beverages, agricultural and other products obtained in accordance with the regulations related to organic production, pharmaceutical products and medical equipment. Experience showed that the national eco-labelling scheme should be supported by the continuous raising of awareness of consumers about its advantages, increased competitiveness of businesses awarded the label, and its connection to the public procurement system. The speaker also noted the importance of flexibility for managing the national eco-labelling scheme through, for example, public-private partnership, adjusting criteria for tourist accommodation and the use of new digital technologies.

16. The Director of the ECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division introduced the global framework initiative "The Sustainability Pledge"⁶ and its Toolbox⁷ to support the garment and footwear industries in addressing impacts and risks for human rights, the environment and human health, and promoting transparency and traceability of the industry throughout their whole value chains. The initiative had been jointly launched by ECE and the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business, in collaboration with the International Trade Centre and with the support of the European Union. Over the period 2019–2023, the project had set up a multi-stakeholder policy platform, and developed *Recommendation No. 46: Enhancing traceability and transparency of sustainable value chains in the garment and footwear sector*,⁸ including implementation guidelines, traceability and information exchange standards, and capacity-building activities to support all stakeholders in the uptake of traceability and transparency approaches. The ongoing respective call for action had already collected 81 pledges from 70 industry actors, with more

⁴ See www.sitra.fi.

⁵ "Type I environmental labelling" refers to "eco-labelling schemes where there are clearly defined criteria for products". See International Organization for Standardization, *Environmental Labels* (Geneva, 2019), p. 4. Available at www.iso.org/files/live/sites/isoorg/files/store/en/PUB100323.pdf.

⁶ See <http://thesustainabilitypledge.org/>.

⁷ See <http://thesustainabilitypledge.org/toolbox.html>.

⁸ United Nations publication, ECE/TRADE/463.

than 350 partners across 22 countries. ECE had also explored the role of advanced technologies and operated blockchain pilots for end-to-end traceability for textile and leather products. To date, over 60 industry actors were involved in the pilots, covering the full spectrum of value chains, across 21 countries, with 20 use cases involving brands, suppliers and manufacturers. The pilots had demonstrated the potential of digital technology to increase trust in the sustainability claims for products and materials, enhance multi-stakeholder communication, and improve access to reliable, coherent and compatible product information. The work undertaken highlighted further needs for global standards, product information exchange, interoperability and data protection, advanced digital technologies, civil society monitoring and multi-stakeholder and cross-divisional cooperation. While to date, the focus had been on the garment and footwear industry, the initiative would soon be expanded to cover other sectors, such as agrifood and critical raw materials.

17. A representative of the International Trade Centre shared activities under the auspices of the One Planet network⁹ and its Consumer Information for Sustainable Consumption and Production programme,¹⁰ which aimed to support the provision of credible sustainability information on products, and accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production, as envisaged in Sustainable Development Goal 12. The Programme was co-led by Consumers International, the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection and the Indonesian State Ministry of Environment and Forestry, with the support of UNEP and other partners. The Programme supported the development of the *Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information: Global guidance on making effective environmental, social and economic claims, to empower and enable consumer choice*,¹¹ which set out minimum principles for the communication of verified and credible information to consumers and a toolkit for their implementation. UNEP also provided the European Union Eastern Partnership countries with technical assistance within the “EU4Environment” project to develop or strengthen national or regional Type-I eco-labelling schemes. Furthermore, to assist businesses and consumers in accessing voluntary environmental and other sustainability standards, code of conducts and audit protocols, the International Trade Centre had developed and maintained the Standards Map free toolkit.¹² Containing more than 300 standards, the toolkit helped users to identify and compare various standards based on sectors and products, origin and destination markets, value chain focus and availability of consumer label and recognition by industry platforms. The tool also provided the possibility to monitor trends and carry out self-assessment for sustainability readiness.

18. A representative of Youth and Environment Europe, also speaking on behalf of the European ECO-Forum, presented the experience of civil society, especially youth, regarding existing challenges and opportunities in promoting access to environmental information on products. Youth had become particularly receptive to green claims and sought to more actively participate in environmental protection but, at the same time, were more vulnerable to “greenwashing” and environmentally unfriendly practices. The development of digital product passports could drastically reduce the threat of misleading claims, promote circular economy, enable green and sustainable innovation and engage youth. Acknowledging the opportunities brought by the Convention’s Updated recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.2) and the *Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information*, the speaker called for: a more systemic integration of the youth perspective into policymaking on sustainable consumption; and efforts to ensure that digital product passports be made more accessible to young consumers and to secure funding for youth organizations to ensure regular and substantial participation of youth in the implementation and promotion of the Convention.

19. In the general discussion, the following recent developments were shared by the representatives of a number of Parties:

⁹ See www.oneplanetnetwork.org/.

¹⁰ See www.oneplanetnetwork.org/programmes/consumer-information-scp.

¹¹ Nairobi, United Nations Environment Programme, 2017.

¹² See www.standardsmap.org/en/home.

(a) France had introduced further significant regulatory measures addressing waste management, circular economy and climate change issues. In particular, those measures concerned: (a) the introduction of a reparability index of electrical products and electronics that should be communicated to consumers at the moment of purchase in store or online; (b) requirements to disclose environment-related information of waste-generating products and the prohibition of green claims that were overly general or difficult to substantiate; and (c) climate-related information disclosure for agrifood and textiles, to inform consumers and promote eco-design and stricter regulation of “carbon neutral” claims as of 1 January 2023;

(b) Georgia had looked into enhancing multi-stakeholder cooperation, digitalization and a market-monitoring system, with active involvement of NGOs, youth and media and international cooperation as possible ways to more effectively provide the public with user-friendly product information and prevent “greenwashing”;

(c) Switzerland was also in the process of strengthening consumer protection legislation against “greenwashing” and premature obsolescence, including requirements for sustainability labels and for information tools. Additionally, several cases against “greenwashing” were being considered by the Commission on Fair Trading with reference to the International Chamber of Commerce Advertising and Marketing Communications Code¹³ regarding truthfulness and substantiation of claims;

(d) The Competition and Markets Authority of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland had published the Guidance on Making Environmental Claims on Goods and Services (the Green Claims Code)¹⁴ to ensure that business understood and complied with their legal obligations and had also produced the Green Claims Code for Shoppers¹⁵ to help consumers spot greenwash. The Authority had been also leading an International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network working group on misleading environmental claims.¹⁶

20. Furthermore, representatives of several NGOs, speaking on behalf of the European ECO-Forum:

(a) Highlighted opportunities to further Convention commitments on public access to environment-related product information, drawing upon the work undertaken regarding product passports and pollutant release and transfer registers;

(b) Underscored the role of the public in monitoring and assessing claims made by business and the growing interest of relevant food authorities in using “citizen science” in sampling products and sharing information, and called for measures to be taken to bridge the existing digital divide;

(c) Reiterated certain persistent challenges when dealing with access to environmental information in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia that could undermine the progress achieved to date, in particular weak interdepartmental cooperation, difficulty in accessing primary data, confidentiality restrictions, unreasonably high costs and difficulties of environmental information exchange even between public authorities.

21. Concluding the discussion, the speakers highlighted the following priority actions that could help to address existing challenges and improve transparency and public accessibility to environment-related information on products:

(a) Widening collaboration and bringing together business, consumer and environmental protection stakeholders;

(b) Promoting international cooperation, harmonizing different initiatives and increasing engagement between different international bodies;

¹³ See <https://iccwbo.org/publication/icc-advertising-and-marketing-communications-code/>.

¹⁴ See www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-claims-code-making-environmental-claims.

¹⁵ See www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-claims-code-for-shoppers.

¹⁶ See <https://icpen.org/>.

- (c) Introducing legally binding regulations in the area and increasing youth representation to render policymaking more future-proof;
- (d) Keeping eco-labelling schemes simple and science-based, and widely promoting them among all stakeholders;
- (e) Focusing on substantiating sustainability information to be provided to consumers;
- (f) Advancing digitalization, collection of and access to more reliable data that could help in monitoring the transformation to green and circular economy.

22. Pursuant to the outcomes of the session, the Working Group:

(a) Expressed appreciation to the representatives of Finland, Serbia, the European Environment Agency, the International Trade Centre, ECE and the European ECO-Forum for their presentations, and welcomed the achievements, good practices and initiatives provided by the representatives of Parties, partner organizations and stakeholders regarding public access to environment-related product information in accordance with article 5 (6) and (8) of the Convention;

(b) Recognized that environmental awareness and education among the public, especially children and youth, and access to sufficient product information in that regard were critical in enabling consumers to make informed environmental choices and supporting sustainable consumption and production;

(c) Reiterated that the effective implementation of article 5 (6) and (8) of the Convention remained essential for attaining Sustainable Development Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production) and supporting the transition towards green and circular economy;

(d) Called on Parties, partner organizations and stakeholders to continue implementing or supporting, as relevant, such tools as eco-labelling, energy labelling, product passports, product declarations, warning labels, green public procurement, codes of conduct and purchasing mechanisms and pollutant release and transfer registers, as reported by the speakers, to promote the disclosure of information by operators to the public;

(e) Urged Parties to promote more effective use of electronic information tools in accordance with decision VII/1 (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1) and the recommendations (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.2) to improve transparency and public access to product information;

(f) Encouraged Parties to support multi-stakeholder dialogue, including through financial means, bringing together various actors such as suppliers, manufacturers, retailers, consumers and environmental NGOs to promote transparency, traceability and accountability in consumer products and involvement of youth and other groups with special needs in attaining sustainable consumption;

(g) Requested the Task Force on Access to Information, in cooperation with the Parties and stakeholders, to continue the expert exchange of information and good practices and possible means of improving access to product information, and promote cooperation with the ECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, One Planet network and other relevant international initiatives and processes dealing with product information.

B. Public participation in decision-making

23. Ms. Loredana Dall'Ora (Chair, Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making) summarized the key activities since the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties. She also stated that preparations had begun for the tenth meeting of the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making, which was scheduled to take place in the second half of 2022 in line with decision VII/2 (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1). She also reminded Parties that 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 the continued sharing of experience, good practices and lessons learned.

24. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the Chair of the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making and of the statements made by the participants speaking on behalf of the European ECO-Forum on different matters related to the subject area. The Working Group called on Parties to support effective public participation in decision-making, in particular for marginalized groups and persons in vulnerable situations and in the context of war and conflict, and encouraged Parties and stakeholders to continue to share experiences in the application of the *Maastricht Recommendations on Promoting Effective Public Participation in Decision-making in Environmental Matters: prepared under the Aarhus Convention*,¹⁷ including through the collection and dissemination of good practices in public participation in decision-making through the Aarhus Clearinghouse and its Good Practice online database. The Working Group reiterated that effective public participation in decision-making in environmental matters supported the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and their targets, and in particular target 16.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels) and it welcomed initiatives by Parties, stakeholders and partner organizations to implement measures set out in decision VII/2 and encouraged continued implementation in that regard.

C. Access to justice

25. Mr. Luc Lavrysen (Chair, Task Force on Access to Justice) reported on the key outcomes of the Task Force's fourteenth meeting and of the Judicial Colloquium "Adjudication of cases related to climate change and air quality", held back-to-back in Geneva on 26–28 April 2022. Justice Marie Baker of the Supreme Court of Ireland spoke about the main points of the Judicial Colloquium, noting, among other issues, that climate change litigation was a relatively new but expanding area of jurisprudence and that the Task Force and Colloquium had provided a valuable and worthwhile opportunity for delegates to exchange views and knowledge in that area.

26. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the Chair of the Task Force on Access to Justice, the report of the fourteenth meeting of the Task Force (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2022/3), and the statement by the representative of the Supreme Court of Ireland, and expressed its appreciation for the work done. It also took note of the statements made by the representatives of the European Union and its member States and of the European ECO-Forum on matters related to the subject area. The Working Group reiterated that effective access to justice in environmental matters supported the achievement of target 16.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals and underpinned the implementation of other relevant Sustainable Development Goals and targets thereof. It welcomed the organization of the Judicial Colloquium and other work undertaken to promote judicial cooperation on environmental matters in the pan-European region, and expressed appreciation to partner organizations for supporting that work. It also welcomed initiatives of the Parties and stakeholders to implement measures set out in decision VII/3 (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1) to date and encouraged continued implementation in that regard.

D. Genetically modified organisms

27. The Chair expressed regret at the lack of progress regarding the ratification of the GMO amendment to the Convention, as the amendment had not been approved by a sufficient number of Parties to enter into force. He recalled that the Meeting of the Parties at its seventh session had urged those Parties whose ratification of the GMO amendment would count towards its entry into force to take urgent steps towards ratification of the amendment and had called upon other Parties to ratify the amendment.¹⁸

28. The representatives of several Parties reported on their countries' progress towards ratification of the GMO amendment. The representative of Armenia stated that draft legislation had been developed to regulate GMOs and that expert training sessions had been

¹⁷ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.15.II.E.7.

¹⁸ ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1, para. 34.

held for key stakeholders. Both actions contributed to providing a solid basis for ratification. The representative of Kazakhstan stated that the relevant ministries were working on the issue of GMOs and had introduced standards and adopted a new environmental code, which also covered GMOs, in preparation for ratification of the amendment in the near future. The representative of Tajikistan reported that a new law had been adopted in 2021 on biosafety and biosecurity and that the Government was raising awareness among State officials, NGOs and other stakeholders, but that the country was not yet in a position to ratify the amendment, as laboratories must first be properly equipped.

29. The Working Group took note of the information provided and the updates shared by the representatives of Armenia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, as well as the statement made by a representative of the European ECO-Forum on recent developments in the subject area. The Working Group reiterated its serious concern and called upon the Parties whose ratification of the GMO amendment would count towards its entry into force (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Ukraine) to take serious steps towards ratification and requested the above-mentioned Parties to report at the next meeting of the Working Group on the progress achieved.

IV. Procedures and mechanisms

A. Compliance mechanism

30. Ms. Áine Ryall (Chair, Compliance Committee) updated participants on the Compliance Committee's activities, in particular the outcomes of its seventy-second, seventy-third, seventy-fourth and seventy-fifth meetings (respectively, Geneva, 18–21 October 2021, 13–16 December 2021, 15–18 March 2022, and 14–17 June 2022)¹⁹ and other relevant developments.

31. A representative of the European Union and its member States thanked the Compliance Committee for its close engagement with the Parties in assisting in the implementation of the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention and for its continued work since the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties. Regarding the suspension of the special rights and privileges of Belarus, which had become effective on 1 February 2022 according to decision VII/8c (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1), the speaker expressed support to members of civil society and environmental NGOs in Belarus and urged the authorities of Belarus to fully adhere to the principles of the Aarhus Convention. A representative of the European ECO-Forum expressed appreciation for the support voiced by the speaker.

32. A representative of the European ECO-Forum congratulated the Chair of the Compliance Committee on her performance since taking up her role and thanked her for her letter to the ministers for foreign affairs of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, dated 27 February 2022, voicing the Committee's grave concerns that persons who are known environmental defenders in Ukraine and their families face imminent danger as a result of the military offensive carried out by the Russian Federation and calling upon all Parties to ensure that environmental defenders in the potential occupied territory of Ukraine would not be persecuted, and to take immediate action to ensure that Ukrainian environmental defenders and their families are offered safe passage and sanctuary.²⁰

33. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the Chair of the Compliance Committee on the outcomes of the Compliance Committee's seventy-second, seventy-third, seventy-fourth and seventy-fifth meetings and representatives of the European Union and its member States and the European ECO-Forum on recent developments and other matters related to the subject area.

¹⁹ See <https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/aarhus-convention/compliance-committee-meetings>.

²⁰ See https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/038_toParties_letter_from_ACCC_Chair_Ukraine_27.02.2022.pdf.

B. Reporting mechanism

34. The secretariat recalled that, 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, those Parties had been invited by the Meeting of the Parties to submit their reports by 1 December 2021. The secretariat informed the Working Group that three of those five countries had subsequently submitted their reports (i.e.: Azerbaijan, on 19 October 2021; Malta, on 11 November 2021; and Republic of Moldova, on 2 December 2021). At the time of the meeting, only the Netherlands and Tajikistan had failed to submit their national implementation reports for the 2021 reporting cycle. The Republic of Moldova was the only country that had failed to submit its report for the previous reporting cycle, and the issue was currently under consideration by the Compliance Committee.

35. The representative of the Netherlands stated that a draft of the national implementation report had been published on the Government's website for public consultation. Several reactions had been received, including from NGOs that acted as communicants in compliance cases regarding the Netherlands, and the Government was in the process of reviewing and incorporating that feedback. The representative stated that the Netherlands hoped to submit the report by the end of the year.

36. The representative of Tajikistan stated that a draft report had been prepared and was being consulted on with relevant stakeholders and finalized, prior to translation and submission.

37. The Working Group took note of the information provided by participants and the secretariat and expressed its concern over the failure of the Netherlands and Tajikistan to submit a report on the implementation of the Convention for the 2021 reporting cycle and urged those Parties to submit their reports without any further delay.

C. Capacity-building and awareness-raising

38. The representative of OSCE shared updates regarding the network of Aarhus Centres, including the possible establishment of an all-island Aarhus Centre for Ireland and Northern Ireland; the upcoming Aarhus Centres Annual Meeting (Vienna, 19–20 October 2022); and guidelines developed on gender mainstreaming for Aarhus Centres staff, partners and stakeholders. He also highlighted the involvement of the Aarhus Centres in the implementation of the project entitled "Stakeholder Engagement for Uranium Legacy Remediation in Central Asia" in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, together with the OSCE field operations in those countries and in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme.

39. The representative of Kazakhstan reported that the country's new environmental code had entered into force on 1 July 2021, which allowed members of the public to take part in decision-making on issues relating to the environment, for which environmental information was publicly available and was not subject to restriction and classification. To support awareness-raising, a unified ecological portal had been developed with OSCE support, and public meetings had been held, helping to ensure the implementation of the Aarhus Convention.

40. The representative of Tajikistan recalled that the country hosted seven Aarhus Centres and reported that the Government had developed a State fund to raise environmental awareness among the population, with support from the OSCE and civil society. Representatives of the Aarhus Centres and of the Committee for the Protection of the Environment had also visited Georgia to exchange experiences with State officials and representatives of NGOs.

41. The representative of the European ECO-Forum noted that the inclusion of young people was vital to the successful implementation of the three pillars of the Convention. She called for greater capacity-building and awareness-raising for young people and for greater support from Parties to ensure their participation in environmental decision-making.

42. The Working Group took note of the statements by the representatives of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, OSCE, and the European ECO-Forum. The Working Group expressed its appreciation to Parties, Aarhus Centres, partner organizations and stakeholders for the continuing cooperation with the secretariat on capacity-building activities at the regional, national and local levels and recognized once again the important role that Aarhus Centres played in providing a neutral platform for authorities, NGOs and other stakeholders to support the Convention's implementation in countries with economies in transition, and to promote multi-stakeholder dialogue on Sustainable Development Goals. In that regard, ensuring the sustainability of Aarhus Centres remained crucially important. It encouraged national focal points to reach out to authorities responsible for development assistance and technical cooperation programmes to explore the possibility of integrating the Aarhus Convention into those programmes as a cross-cutting instrument supporting the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals.

V. Accession by non-United Nations Economic Commission for Europe member States and other relevant developments and interlinkages related to the promotion of the Convention

43. The secretariat reported on accession to the Convention by States from outside the ECE region. The secretariat recalled that the Meeting of the Parties had approved the accession of Guinea-Bissau to the Convention at its seventh session.²¹ At the time of the meeting, the deposit of the instruments of accession by Guinea-Bissau remained pending.

44. The representative of Guinea-Bissau stated that events in Guinea-Bissau – notably an attempted coup d'état in February 2022 and the dissolution of parliament – had slowed down the ratification process. New authorities in the Ministry of Environment and Biodiversity were working on the process and the representative expected that Guinea-Bissau would deposit the treaty instruments in the coming weeks following the meeting. The representative also stated that Guinea-Bissau was preparing a legislative package to align existing legislation with the Convention. The representative of the Association of Lawyers for the Defence of the Environment and Natural Resources of Guinea-Bissau and the NGO Sustainable Management and Valorization of Resources made a statement regarding the accession.

45. The representative of the European ECO-Forum welcomed the outcomes of the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement) (Santiago, 20–22 April 2022), noting that the European ECO-Forum had had the opportunity to advise civil society actors from the region in their preparations for the meeting.

46. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the secretariat and the representatives of Guinea-Bissau, the Association of Lawyers for the Defence of the Environment and Natural Resources of Guinea-Bissau and the NGO Sustainable Management and Valorization of Resources, and the European ECO-Forum. It welcomed initiatives taken by the secretariat, Parties or stakeholders to promote the Aarhus Convention beyond the ECE region and in other relevant processes, such as the Escazú Agreement. It called upon the secretariat and other relevant organizations to continue cooperation and further promote synergy in the area of environmental rights.

VI. Next ordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties

47. The secretariat informed the Working Group that no offers to host the eighth ordinary session of the Meeting of the Parties had been received to date. The secretariat recalled that

²¹ ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1, decision VII/10.

the next session would be held in 2025, as decided by the Meeting of the Parties at its seventh session.²² No specific date had been determined so far, as that would depend on the host.

48. The Working Group took note of the information provided by the secretariat and encouraged Parties to express interest in hosting the next session of the Meeting of the Parties.

VII. Implementation of work programmes for 2018–2021 and for 2022–2025, including financial matters

49. Turning to the implementation of the work programmes for 2018–2021 and 2022–2025, including financial matters, the secretariat informed the Working Group about the contributions and expenditures received in relation to the implementation of the Convention's work programmes for 2018–2021 and 2022–2025. That included an update on recent contributions not reflected in the Report on the implementation of the work programmes for 2018–2021 and 2022–2025 (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2022/4) as they had been received after the cut-off date of 1 April 2022. Representatives of the European Union, Switzerland and European ECO-Forum made statements in that regard.

50. The Working Group took note of the Report on the implementation of the work programmes for 2018–2021 and 2022–2025 and of the Report on contributions and expenditures in relation to the implementation of the Convention's work programmes for 2018–2021 and 2022–2025 (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2022/5), and the information provided by the secretariat and delegations. It called upon the Parties to proceed with making financial contributions as soon as possible and expressed its concern at the fact that contributions were still arriving late in the year. The Working Group welcomed the synergies with partner organizations that helped to promote effective implementation of the work programme and expressed appreciation for the work done by the secretariat.

VIII. Thematic session on promotion of the principles of the Convention in international forums

51. Ms. Marie-Hélène Sa Vilas Boas (Chair of the thematic session) opened the session. The topics for discussion included the promotion of the principles of the Aarhus Convention in the negotiations for legally binding instruments on plastics, under the auspices of UNEP, and on business and human rights, under the auspices of the Human Rights Council, based on decision VII/4 (ECE/MP.PP/2021/2/Add.1) adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its seventh session. The discussion also included updates on subjects considered by the Working Group of the Parties at its twenty-fifth meeting (Geneva (online), 3 May, and Geneva (hybrid), 7–8 June 2021), namely, promotion of the principles of the Convention in processes under the Convention on Biological Diversity and in international forums in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

A. Plastics

52. A representative of UNEP congratulated the Parties to the Aarhus Convention on their efforts to promote public participation and transparency and invited participants to provide feedback on the plastics treaty. She noted that the United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 5/14 entitled "End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument"²³ had called for the convening of an intergovernmental negotiating committee to develop a legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. She outlined the scope of the resolution and major steps for the way forward. The resolution highlighted the important role of stakeholders, including the private sector, and the importance of cooperation at the global, regional, national and local levels and of initiating a multi-stakeholder action agenda. Furthermore, the resolution called for a forum

²² ECE/MP.PP/2021/2, para. 113.

²³ UNEP/EA.5/Res.14, paras. 1 and 3.

to be convened in conjunction with the first meeting of the intergovernmental negotiating committee, building upon existing initiatives, where appropriate, and open to all stakeholders to exchange information. Observers from NGOs were welcome to make presentations and contribute to the negotiation process.

53. A representative of Portugal presented her country's experience with regards to public participation in the Second United Nations Ocean Conference (Lisbon, 27 June–1 July 2022) and the resumed fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP (Nairobi (hybrid), 28 February–2 March 2022). Speaking about the upcoming Second United Nations Ocean Conference, she noted that it was multi-stakeholder event in nature, involving Governments, the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations, international financial institutions, NGOs, civil society organizations, academia, the scientific community, the private sector and philanthropic organizations. A total of 934 stakeholder entities were registered and expected to participate in the Conference, which would feature eight interactive dialogues, including on addressing marine pollution, as well as 16 side events dedicated to plastic pollution. The Conference would welcome voluntary commitments from all stakeholders to contribute to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development). Portugal also played a leading role in the Nairobi Group of Friends on marine litter and plastic pollution, an informal space for constructive dialogue around the issue of plastic pollution/marine litter between Member States, NGOs, the private sector and academia. Speaking of best practices, the speaker noted a multi-stakeholder approach across the process and the organization of the "Blue Talks" in the run-up to the Conference in order to raise awareness of the importance of the ocean and foster cooperation among stakeholders. Challenges include the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as involving business and industry in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14.

54. A representative of the Centre for International Environmental Law/the European ECO-Forum presented major challenges and opportunities regarding promotion of environmental democracy in the plastics treaty negotiations. He noted that the Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes had expressed concern that opportunities for the public participation had been minimal or non-existent in decision-making processes thus far.²⁴ Given that United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 5/14 called for the widest and most effective participation possible, it would be necessary to ensure that negotiations were inclusive and effective for all stakeholders. The speaker recommended that, in line with the Almaty Guidelines,²⁵ the accreditation process should be as open and simple as possible; stakeholders should be granted speaking slots and be allowed to propose text and amendments while items were under consideration; civil society and other relevant groups, including women, children, youth, workers and members of indigenous communities, should participate from an early stage in the negotiations, including in substantive preparation; and stakeholders should have access to funding to participate in all related meetings. The COVID-19 pandemic must not be used as a pretext to limit public participation, and mechanisms to support the online participation of certain groups in vulnerable situations should be facilitated. He called for further thematic meetings to be held to discuss issues of public participation, access to justice and mechanisms for compensation for plastic pollution, as well as linkages with the Protocol on PRTRs.

55. The representative of Norway noted that her country attached great importance to transparency and public participation. One of the most effective ways to ensure the success of a treaty was through participation by relevant stakeholders early on in the treaty-making process. Referring in particular to its efforts to strengthen international governance of plastic pollution, she said that Norway had provided funding for and cooperated with civil society in the development and dissemination of information on the matter, included civil society in its delegations at the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP, and provided a solution to address challenges regarding participation of groups particularly vulnerable to plastic pollution in negotiations on that issue.

²⁴ A/76/207.

²⁵ ECE/MP.PP/2005/2/Add.5, annex.

56. The representative of Albania took the floor to present the measures her country had taken to combat plastic pollution, including a ban on single-use plastic bags, and reiterated that cooperation with the public and corporations was essential in that regard.

B. Business and human rights

57. A representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights introduced the Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises with respect to Human Rights – established in 2014 by Human Rights Council resolution 26/9 on elaboration of an international legally binding instrument on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights.²⁶ She also explained the modalities of participation of State and non-State stakeholders in that process as per the rules of procedure of the Human Right Council. States, specialized agencies, intergovernmental organizations, national human rights institutions and NGOs could make oral submissions; written engagement was mostly in response to calls for submission. Official documents of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group were translated and circulated in all official languages of the United Nations and all statements by States and other stakeholders were posted on the Working Group web page.²⁷ Lastly, the treaty-making process had greatly benefited from the participation of civil society organizations, especially through the Treaty Alliance,²⁸ which brought together over 1,000 civil society organizations.

58. A representative of France highlighted that responsible business conduct was an important part of the social responsibilities of businesses and this had to be consistent with ideals of environmental democracy. Regarding challenges, he noted that four different communities, namely human rights defenders, environmental activists, businesses and scientists, had to interact with each other and constant dialogue had to be established between those communities. States must also facilitate dialogue and should not merely confine themselves to regulation. He spoke about a national platform for responsible business conduct that had been created in France, under which Government, civil society, science and businesses interacted. In particular, it had made a key contribution to the 2017 French due diligence law and the European Union draft due diligence directive.²⁹ He stressed that the 2017 French law was one of first binding instruments in the world regarding due diligence and access to justice. As to the draft international instrument on human rights and business, there were some clear divergences of opinions between States Members of the United Nations and a number of States did not favour a legally binding text. Discussions had been delayed and progress had been limited to date. A Group of Friends of the Presidency of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises with respect to Human Rights had been announced by the Ecuadorian presidency. The representative believed that said Group of Friends would help to start a richer dialogue among Intergovernmental Working Group members.

59. A representative of the Irish Environmental Network/the European ECO-Forum highlighted that the climate crisis, ever-increasing loss of biodiversity and environmental degradation across the world were widely recognized as some of the greatest challenges ever faced by the international community. She noted that it was essential that Parties to the Aarhus Convention reach out to influence the wider international context in order to ensure the delivery of the healthy environment key to human rights, as recognized in article 1 of the Convention. She also noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had been used as a pretext to limit the reach of environmental democracy, and that Parties must engage and reverse that trend. She highlighted the ongoing treaty negotiation process and called on all Parties to engage, and to be vigilant and resist any weakening of the text of the business and human rights treaty. A further opportunity had arisen with a proposed new protocol to the European Convention

²⁶ A/HRC/RES/26/9.

²⁷ See www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/wg-trans-corp/igwg-on-tnc.

²⁸ See www.treatymovement.com/.

²⁹ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/proposal-directive-corporate-sustainable-due-diligence-and-annex_en.

on Fundamental Rights on the right to healthy environment, which was clearly complementary to article 1 of the Aarhus Convention. She urged the Parties to vigorously champion and fully support that initiative, as well as to build trust and facilitate a robust legal framework for sustainable business development, which was critically important in the negotiation process.

C. Additional topics

60. The secretariat stated that the Convention on Biological Diversity had reported that there was no update or changes to the rules of procedure of the Convention.

61. A representative of Earthjustice/the European ECO-Forum highlighted the negotiations for the global diversity framework, which would become the next general framework for the operation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and called upon all Parties to stay in contact with their colleagues participating in the negotiations to ensure that access to information and access to justice are explicitly included in Target 21. He noted that it was extremely important for those rights to be protected under the Convention on Biological Diversity and to protect environmental defenders. He also noted the work being carried out by the International Seabed Authority (ISA), consisting of 167 Parties including the European Union, which was mandated under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to organize, regulate and control mineral-related activities in the international seabed area. Earthjustice, along with the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, which included over 100 NGOs, wished to highlight that the ISA Legal and Technical Commission held its meetings behind closed doors. He called upon the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, under their obligation arising from article 3 (7) thereof, to urge the Commission to hold open sessions, as the issue being discussed, the international seabed, was a common heritage of humankind and such discussions cannot take place behind closed doors. He concluded by urging the Parties to ensure that public participation in decision-making was respected in that forum and that such discussions be postponed until all relevant stakeholders were provided with open access.

D. General discussion

62. The representative of Georgia shared her country's experience regarding the promotion of the principles of the Aarhus Convention at the twenty-sixth session of Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (Glasgow, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 31 October–13 November 2021). Georgia had organized a number of events prior to, during and after the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties, including a national conference in a hybrid format, prior to the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties, to discuss and deliberate priorities, climate change and mitigation efforts and the role of the private sector in green finance, among other things. State institutions, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders had participated in the discussions. She noted that the hybrid format facilitated the participation of representatives of organizations that could not send a representative to attend a given event in person but acknowledged that physical participation was more effective.

63. A representative of Oekobuero/European ECO-Forum highlighted the promotion of the Aarhus Convention principles in decision-making regarding nuclear installations and activities. As the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had the mandate to ensure nuclear non-proliferation and promote nuclear safety, all States Members of the United Nations, including the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, and other organizations sought advice from IAEA regarding nuclear energy; thus, IAEA and its processes constituted a critical international environmental decision-making forum within the meaning of article 3 (7) of the Convention. She highlighted the important role of public participation in decision-making on the construction of nuclear power plants and the storage, disposal and handling of nuclear waste. She noted that, despite the Aarhus Convention principles being increasingly accepted by various States, within IAEA confidentiality was still the rule. She therefore called upon the Parties to promote the principles of the Convention at IAEA, including access

to information and public participation and fostering the active involvement of members of the public in international events.

64. A representative of the Centre for International Environmental Law/the European ECO-Forum noted that civil society and indigenous peoples' organizations had been facing increasing challenges in public participation in the processes of UNFCCC. She gave the example of the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to UNFCCC, where civil society and indigenous peoples' organizations had faced restricted access to the negotiations rooms and had experienced difficulties in obtaining accreditation, in stark contrast to fossil fuel companies at the same event. She urged the Parties to the Aarhus Convention to continuously engage with the Conference of the Parties to UNFCCC presidencies and to take all steps necessary to ensure public participation in such important international forums.

65. A representative of the European Citizen Science Association/the European ECO-Forum, spoke about the negotiations for a legally binding instrument on plastics and highlighted the leadership role played by Germany during its presidency of the European Union, with the development of the "Plastic Pirates – Go Europe!" initiative,³⁰ which demonstrated that citizen science could provide ways to recode information and raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals by monitoring plastic pollution. He encouraged the Parties to the Aarhus Convention to engage with civil society and citizen science organizations in that area.

E. Chair's summary of the session

66. The Chair of the thematic session thanked the panellists and other speakers for their valuable substantive contributions, which had demonstrated the importance of the promotion of the Convention's principles in international forums. She remarked with interest that the session's two panels had many parallels. In particular, the negotiations for the legally binding instruments on plastics and on business and human rights both referred to processes in which there was strong interest from corporations and diverse stakeholders along different value chains, and where there were clear opportunities and challenges for the promotion of the principles of the Aarhus Convention.

67. The Chair noted that the presentations from panellists served as a reminder that the obligation under article 3 (7) referred to promoting the principles of the Convention both in how negotiations were conducted and in the substantive matters being negotiated, which had been clearly reflected in the presentations and discussions in the session. Participants had heard about good practices, such as those that demonstrated innovative mechanisms to support access to information and public participation regarding plastics and business and human rights, and those that reflected effective modes of public participation in negotiations and other meetings under international forums, both in cases where in-person participation was possible and in cases where it is not. The Chair encouraged Parties and stakeholders to guarantee as much physical participation as possible, without neglecting the potential of online participation. In particular, that was important for supporting vulnerable groups generally underrepresented in public participation processes.

68. The Chair also underlined the many real and pressing challenges presented by the panellists and speakers, including calls for the Parties to the Aarhus Convention to do more to uphold the principles of the Convention in international forums regarding plastics and business and human rights, as well as those focused on climate change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, ISA and IAEA. She recalled that one important recommendation made during the thematic session was for States to include civil society and public representatives in government delegations. It was also clear, in the light of the suggestions on the way forward made by the speakers, that there were opportunities for more proactive engagement by Parties to the Aarhus Convention in negotiations, in the case of the legally binding instrument on business and human rights, as well as for Parties to support the widest and most effective participation possible in the negotiations for a legally binding instrument on plastics.

³⁰ See www.plastic-pirates.eu/en.

69. Lastly, the Chair recalled the ongoing challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic and the compounding effect of the emerging energy and food crises. The Chair underlined that the pandemic had reshaped many of the ways in which government institutions, civil society, the public and other stakeholders interacted, and highlighted the point made by a representative of the European ECO-Forum that recovery from the pandemic must be undertaken in a way that restored and fostered environmental democracy, particularly in international decision-making that would shape the path to recovery from those interconnected challenges.

F. Conclusions

70. Pursuant to the outcomes of the session, the Working Group:

(a) Expressed its appreciation to the representatives of France, Portugal, UNEP, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the European ECO-Forum for their presentations and took note of the information provided;

(b) Welcomed achievements and good practices as presented by Parties and stakeholders;

(c) Took note of the issues, challenges – especially for NGOs – and opportunities for public participation in international decision-making on legally binding instruments on plastic pollution and on business and human rights, as raised by Parties and stakeholders during the discussion;

(d) Urged Parties to continue to promote the Convention’s principles in international forums and processes related to legally binding instruments on plastic pollution and on business and human rights;

(e) Welcomed the progress made in promoting the Convention’s principles in international forums but recognized that more efforts should be made to further transparency and effective public participation in international environment-related decision-making, including in processes under the Convention on Biological Diversity, in processes related to climate and nuclear matters and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic;

(f) Called on Parties to take action to improve public participation in the ISA processes, in accordance with article 3 (7) of the Convention;

(g) Urged Parties to continue fulfilling their obligations under article 3 (7) of the Convention and to consider the results achieved at the next meeting of the Working Group;

(h) Reiterated that promotion of transparency and effective public participation in international decision-making on environmental matters was key for achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goals 12, 14, 15, 16 and 17.

IX. Adoption of outcomes

71. The Working Group adopted the major outcomes and decisions of the meeting,³¹ and requested the secretariat, in consultation with the Chair, to finalize the report and incorporate those adopted outcomes and decisions therein.

³¹ See “Meeting outcomes and Report” tab, AC/WGP-26/Inf.3, at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/twenty-sixth-meeting-working-group-parties-aarhus-convention>.