

Agenda item 2: War in Ukraine and implementation of the Convention
27th Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention
Geneva, 26-28 June 2023

Thank you chair. I beg for your indulgence because I actually do not have a prepared statement. I am speaking now because our dear colleague from Ukraine, who was expected to be here in Geneva and deliver her own statement, cannot do so due to a personal emergency. This is a circumstance which, unfortunately, we know all too well. It can happen to any of us at any time but, unfortunately, emergencies happen to our colleagues in Ukraine on a daily basis. All the time. I regret that I cannot share her thoughts now and I cannot do them justice, but I would nonetheless like to say a few words on the behalf of the European ECO Forum.

First of all I really wish to express my thanks to the representatives from Ukraine for being here in the first place. I know that means a great commitment. Both institutionally for Ukraine and for both of you personally, so thank you for that.

Thank you also for the measures that Ukraine is taking. The ones the representatives from Ukraine just outlined in their presentation, but also in particular Ukraine's seeking advice from the Compliance Committee as to how best to comply with its obligations under the Convention during these times of Russia's unjustified war against Ukraine. Thank you.

I thank you also for taking steps during these incredible times to adopt the GMO amendment, becoming the last Party to do so in order to bring that instrument into force.

And we also thank the others for their interventions, namely the representatives from Georgia, the EU, Norway and the United Kingdom and we would like to echo their statements. We also condemn Russia's illegal and brutal war against Ukraine in the strongest possible terms. And we echo the call to all Parties to take whatever measures they can to ensure assistance to Ukraine in dealing with the devastating environmental and human rights violations that occur there daily.

It saddens me that no colleagues from Ukraine are here to express themselves directly. But I can tell you that they are working daily under the most incredible circumstances to do their part as NGOs to ensure that Ukraine is dealing with these horrible violations in the best of possible ways.

We cannot stress enough our concern regarding the enormous environmental risks posed and realized, which are arising from this conflict. Some of them are related to nuclear, as one of our other colleagues wished to highlight, but we also have the attack on the Kakhovka dam, a brutal act of ecocide unleashing unimaginable damages to the environment. Thus, we urge all parties to take into account going forward certain realities in design and safety protocols. We know just how vulnerable critical infrastructure – nuclear, hydrodams, chemical plants, and more are – what risks they can face from terrorist attacks. And we see now that such attacks can occur, and indeed have occurred. So we share the concerns with our ECO Forum colleagues about these risks, although there are differing views among us about how best to go about dealing with them.

Finally, I thank you in particular, Chair, for your indulgence of these remarks, the best we can do under these difficult circumstances. I am sure my Ukrainian colleagues would have been much more eloquent and have provided a much fairer view of the risks and challenges they face in helping Ukraine in its implementation of the Convention every day.

Thank you.