

#### **4. (b) Access to information, Aarhus WGP 2023**

**Frederik Hafen on behalf of Ruzanna Gharzaryan Dalma-Sona, Environmental Fund**

##### **Brief Statement on Ecological Disaster in Yereven, Armenia**

I would like to bring to your attention an issue of lack of access to information regarding a recent disaster in Yereven, Armenia. I am relaying this statement to you on behalf of Ruzanna Gharzaryan of the Dalma-Sona, Environmental Fund.

On May 18, 2023, a fire broke out in the Nubarashen garbage landfill site in Yerevan. In the aftermath of the garbage burning, the air was polluted with toxins and pollutants harmful to human health, like carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, dioxins and other dangerous cancer-causing substances. Obviously, the danger was most immediately threatening for nearby residents. However, by now, the residual ash from garbage burning has in turn led to soil and water pollution.

About 1,000 cubic meters of garbage was being burned in different hearths of fire during more than 10 days covering an area of about 5 hectar. We are talking about toxic smoke and gases spread both over the capital city and other nearby settlements.

In such conditions the relevant authorities failed to provide the local population with any instructions or information such as advice to avoid getting outside into the open area or other health risk mitigating measures. While the main issue was that of failure to actively disseminate relevant information to the public, there was also nothing done to ensure the right of public participation in decision making.

Only the national Center for Hydrometeorology and Monitoring issued information that the concentration of dust and nitrogen dioxide had exceeded the permissible level. According to their press release, dated May 19, 2023, the harmful pollutants such as dioxins, polychlorinated biphenyls, poly aromatic hydrocarbons and other pollutants may have been released into the atmosphere as a result of the fire at Nubarashen garbage landfill site.

Neither the Government, nor the Ministries of Health or Environment have delivered any instruction or adopted any decision. On 24 May, 2023, 22 NGOs and a number of representatives of the civil society sent requests to these and other relevant bodies – including a request for further information. To date, there has been no answer received.

In 2003 Armenia signed the Protocol on pollutant release and transfer registers to the Aarhus Convention (PRTR), which has not been ratified yet. In 2011 the government adopted a Decree on approving the list of measures to fulfill the obligations of Armenia arising from a number of international environmental conventions, including the Aarhus Convention, but there is nothing in that list about creating and maintaining the Registers mentioned in the Protocol.

Till now, Armenia does not have a Register made in accordance with the requirements of the Protocol, the objective of which is to enhance public access to information through the establishment of coherent, integrated, nationwide pollutant release and transfer registers

(PRTRs) in accordance with the provisions of the Protocol, which could facilitate public participation in environmental decision-making as well as contribute to the prevention and reduction of pollution of the environment /**Article 1**/.

We invite you to take stock of this issue and urge the Armenian government and environmental authorities to issue timely information in case of disasters and accidents in order to mitigate risks and uphold the obligations under the Aarhus Convention.

The Nubarashen garbage landfill site in Yerevan incident I have described is an issue of timely access to information but also one of public participation and accountability for failure to uphold obligations and other responsibilities arising from the Convention.

***Thank you for your attention***

***Ruzanna Ghazaryan.***

Head of “Dalma-Sona” Environmental Fund,  
II Grade Civil Service Counciller

Please see:

1.This is Yerevan, The Fire in Nubarashen.-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrIK27JWTC8&t=96s>

2."Nubarashen" solid household waste dump of Yerevan: 30 September, 2018 r.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S19KI6F3hE0>

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