

Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (WGP 27)
(Geneva 26-28. June 2023)

Agenda Item 5 a): Rapid response mechanism

Norway

Thank you Chair,

We are facing grave challenges due to loss of biodiversity, increased pollution and global warming. They are all caused by human activity and can only be solved by humans. Environmental human rights defenders are essential agents of change.

The protection of human rights defenders is an important priority for Norway. I reiterate Norway's full support for environmental human rights defenders around the world, and their safety and protection.

Environmental human rights defenders should be viewed as a resource, not a threat. As we heard earlier today, they can improve decision-making and implementation, and ensure better and more sustainable outcomes by bringing knowledge, expertise and alternative perspectives,. Recognising their positive and legitimate role is in itself an important step towards better protection.

The situation of environmental human rights defenders may be challenging also within Parties to the Convention, as we have heard earlier today and as may also be illustrated by the information from the special rapporteur, including the information that he has received 11 complaints so far.

Therefore, the establishment of a rapid response mechanism with a Special Rapporteur for the protection of environmental defenders is an important step towards much needed strengthening of their protection and for the advancement of environmental democracy.

The effect of the mechanism on the safety and protection of environmental human rights defenders exercising their rights under the Aarhus Convention depends on its use by the defenders, the respect of the Parties for the mechanism and the work of the Special Rapporteur.

We commend Michel Forst for the work he has done so far as the first Special Rapporteur to put the mechanism into practice and enable it to make a difference by increasing the protection for environmental human rights

defenders. We commend him for his efforts to carry out dialogue with and engage both the public, including environmental defenders themselves, the parties and international organisations and institutions.

The efficiency of the mechanism and thus the impact on the protection of environmental human rights defenders depend on sufficient resources. This is underlined by the letter sent by the Chair of the Aarhus MOP via the UNECE Executive Secretary to all Aarhus Parties, including our Minister of Climate and Environment.

Norway made an additional contribution of NOK 350.000 in 2022 to the work under the Convention, to be used primarily for the work under the mechanism. Whether this would be possible also this year will depend on the availability of resources and the priorities to be made for their use.

We appreciate the efforts made by the Secretariat to follow up on para 18 of Decision VII/9 by the Meeting of the Parties which requests the Secretary-General to strengthen the secretariat's capacity to facilitate the implementation of the rapid response mechanism. Norway actively supported proposals for decisions to that end in the EXCOM and the ECE. We will do our best to contribute to the necessary decision will be taken by the ECOSOC as proposed. This might contribute to ensure the necessary resources for the mechanism.

Thank you Chair