

**United Kingdom statement on the Rapid response mechanism:**

Thank you, Chair.

There has never been a more important time for the Aarhus Convention to ensure the rights of environmental defenders are protected. Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine rages on, representing a clear violation of international law and a challenge to environmental democracy, the protection of human rights as well as the principles of the Aarhus Convention.

The United Kingdom has welcomed the establishment of the Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders and the election by consensus of Mr. Michel Forst. We hope fellow Parties share the same concerns and would seek to help ensure that environmental defenders are not subject to further persecution, penalisation and harassment.

The decision to adequately fund the rapid response mechanism and the secretariat's capacity for delivering on its mandate is fundamentally a decision to advance the protection of environmental democracy. We must ensure the protection of work by the UN Special Rapporteurs and other Special Procedures elsewhere who report on the situations of Human Rights Defenders, as agreed upon at the October 2021 Meeting of the Parties and as part of our obligations under Article 3(8) of the Convention.

The United Kingdom remains committed to financially contributing to the Aarhus Convention and its activities, including the work of the Special Rapporteur.

At this important moment in the history of the Aarhus Convention, we strongly reiterate our support for the new Special Rapporteur and the rapid response mechanism.

Thank you, Chair.