

**FIFTY-SECOND MEETING OF THE BUREAU OF THE
MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE
CONVENTION ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN
DECISION-MAKING AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS
(AARHUS CONVENTION)**

28 March 2024, Geneva

REPORT OF THE MEETING¹

ATTENDANCE

Bureau members: Mr. Aurimas Saladžius (Lithuania, Chair), Ms. Nicolette Bouman (Netherlands, Vice-Chair), Ms. Nino Gokhelašvili (Georgia, Vice-Chair), Ms. Chiara Landini (Italy), Ms. Laura Gornicioiu (European Union, remotely), Ms. Kateryna Luchko (Ukraine, remotely), Ms. Malaj Enkelejda (Albania, remotely).

Observers: Ms. Summer Kern (NGO Observer, European ECO Forum, remotely).

I. Opening and adoption of agenda

1. Mr. Aurimas Saladžius, Chair, opened the meeting and outlined its main objectives, namely: (a) review the progress in implementing the current work programme and consider future planned activities; (b) pave the way for decisions to be taken by the Convention's Working Group of the Parties at its 28th meeting (Geneva, 2-4 July 2024) and (c) discuss items in preparation for the eighth ordinary session of the Convention's Meeting of the Parties.

2. The Bureau took note of the information provided by the Chair and adopted the provisional agenda of the meeting.

II. Status of ratification of the Convention, its amendment and the Protocol

3. The Bureau took note of the information provided by the secretariat on the status of ratifications. Since the latest meeting of the Working Group of the Parties in June 2023 there have been no new ratifications of the Convention or the amendment on public participation in decisions on the deliberate release into the environment and placing on the market of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). There have also been no new ratifications of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs).

III. Implementation of the work programme for 2022-2025, including financial matters

4. The Bureau took note of the report on the implementation of the work programme for 2022-2025 prepared by the secretariat, covering the activities carried out between 16 April 2023 and 29 February 2024. It also took note of the Overview of contributions and pledges in relation to the implementation of the work programme for 2022-2025 and requested the secretariat to update and submit the reports to the 28th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties.

5. The Bureau noted that several Parties have not contributed financially to the Convention for a number of years in a row. It agreed to send a letter from the Chair, on behalf of the Bureau, to those countries whose contributions and pledges are pending. In the light of the expanded workload and increased complexity of tasks on compliance matters, the Bureau agreed on the need to call on all Parties to: (a) substantially increase their annual contribution to the Convention to cover fully the

¹ This document was not formally edited.

requirements of the work programme taking into account demands related to the above-mentioned tasks and (b) increase their additional annual contribution to support the Compliance Committee's work due to the rise of its assignments.

6. It also took note on the information provided by the Chair on the outcomes of the Sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6).

IV. Preparations for the 28th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties

(a) Access to information

7. The Bureau considered a note on progress achieved in this work area and suggestions for the future work, prepared by the Chair of the Task Force on Access to Information. The Bureau expressed its appreciation to the Chair for such comprehensive document and asked the secretariat to make the note available for the 28th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties. In addition, the Bureau also observed that the following issues deserve attention in the next intersessional period: citizen science, cyber security, the role of public authorities in reliability of data and misinformation of the public, Big Data and artificial intelligence in access to information, greenwashing and product information, and access to information in armed conflicts. In this discussion, the Bureau did not consider limitations in capacity or budgetary implications of the additional proposed topics.

(b) Public participation in decision-making

8. The Bureau considered a note on progress achieved in this work area and suggestions for the future work, prepared by the Chair of the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making. The Bureau expressed its appreciation to the Chair for such comprehensive document and asked the secretariat to make the note available for the 28th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties. In addition, the Bureau also observed that the following issues deserve attention in the next intersessional period: harassments and SLAPPs against environmental defenders, pollution and the use of chemicals, public participation in decision-making concerning protected areas, protection of environmental defenders in general and in armed conflicts in particular, reviews of citizen assemblies in terms of their effectiveness under the Aarhus Convention. In this discussion, the Bureau did not consider limitations in capacity or budgetary implications of the additional proposed topics.

(c) Access to justice

9. The Bureau considered a note on progress achieved in this work area and suggestions for the future work, prepared by the Chair of the Task Force on Access to Justice. The Bureau expressed its appreciation to the Chair for such comprehensive document and asked the secretariat to make the note available for the 28th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties. In addition, the Bureau also observed that the following issues deserve attention in the next intersessional period: the application of the Convention in different judicial systems, SLAPPs, environmental crime/ecocide, environmental product information, access to justice in the area of GMOs. In this discussion, the Bureau did not consider limitations in capacity or budgetary implications of the additional proposed topics.

(d) Genetically modified organisms

10. The Bureau took note of the recent GMO-related activities and plans for the future work on the basis of the report on the implementation of the work programme for 2022-2025 and draft elements of the future work programme. The Bureau also noted the link of this work area with the issue of traceability in the context of product information.

(e) Promotion of the Convention's principles

11. The Bureau considered a note on progress achieved in this work area and suggestions for the future work, prepared by the Chair of the thematic session on promoting the application of the principles

of the Convention in international forums. The Bureau expressed its appreciation to the Chair for such comprehensive document and asked the secretariat to make the note available for the 28th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties. In addition, the Bureau also observed that the following issues deserve attention in the next intersessional period: a guide for the host country should also cover the aspect of safe participation and the protection of environmental defenders by the host country, among other forums also in forums dealing with marine environment, should be added to guiding materials (see paragraph 21 of the Chair's Note). In this discussion, the Bureau did not consider limitations in capacity or budgetary implications of the additional proposed topics.

(f) Future work programme

12. The Bureau considered the draft elements of the future work programme 2026-2029 and requested the secretariat to amend the draft document in the light of the comments by the Bureau and submit the revised document to the 28th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties.

(g) Financial arrangements

13. The Bureau considered the draft elements of possible financial arrangements under the Convention and requested the secretariat to amend the draft in the light of the comments provided by the Bureau and circulate it to the Bureau for further comments and finalization through electronic decision-making. Upon the Bureau's approval, the secretariat would submit the revised document to the 28th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties.

(h) Agenda of the 28th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties

14. The Bureau considered the draft provisional agenda of the 28th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties and agreed on it at the meeting. The Bureau requested the secretariat to finalize the document in consultation with the Chair and submit the document to the 28th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties.

V. Preparation of the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties

15. The Bureau was informed by the secretariat that the Government of Lithuania reconfirmed its preliminary interest in hosting the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties (MOP-8) and the fifth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs during the second half of 2025 in Vilnius. The Bureau welcomed the offer of the Government of Lithuania and requested the secretariat to keep it informed of the developments.

16. The Bureau considered the draft provisional agenda for MOP-8 and requested the secretariat to amend the draft in the light of the comments provided by the Bureau and circulate it to the Bureau for further comments and finalization through electronic decision-making. Upon the Bureau's approval, the secretariat would submit the revised document to the 28th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties.

VI. Calendar of meetings

17. The Bureau took note of the calendar of planned activities under the Convention for 2024 as reported by the secretariat, available at <https://unece.org/info/events/unece-meetings-and-events/environmental-policy/public-participation>.

VII. Closing

18. The Bureau agreed to hold its next meeting back-to-back following the 28th meeting of the Working Group. The Chair thanked the Bureau for constructive work and the secretariat for its support and closed the meeting.
