

## Twenty-eighth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention

- Thank you for inviting UNEP to the Twenty-eighth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention.
- I am pleased to introduce UNEP's second report on environmental rule of law, titled "Environmental Rule of Law: Tracking Progress and Charting Future Directions," with a focus on access to justice.
- What is environmental rule of law? It is an evolving concept, generally understood as "the principles of rule of law applied in the environmental context."
- Why is environmental rule of law important? Beyond environmental benefits, it provides economic and social advantages. The absence of environmental rule of law undermines good governance across sectors. Consistent, fair, and effective implementation of environmental law enhances the legitimacy of government actions and builds public confidence in institutions.
- The report features four substantive chapters: Laws and institutions, civic engagement, rights, and justice. I will now highlight key findings from the justice chapter. A well-functioning justice system is essential for environmental rule of law as it deters violations, improves compliance, and creates accountability within government branches.
- Four global trends have recently impacted courts in environmental matters:
  - The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digitalization of judicial systems.
  - Judicial action on climate change has surged, particularly in addressing executive and legislative inactions.
  - The nature and scope of remedies have broadened significantly, including orders for environmental restoration, symbolic compensation, declaratory judgments, and public education programs.
  - With the transboundary nature of many environmental issues, courts are increasingly willing to grant remedies to plaintiffs affected by foreign entities within their jurisdiction.
- Environmental rule of law is instrumental in achieving our environmental goals. UNEP remains committed to supporting the parties to the Aarhus Convention and the Secretariat in advancing environmental rule of law and enhancing access to justice.
- Thank you.