8. Promotion of the Convention and other relevant developments and interlinkages.

Statement by Magdolna Tóthné Nagy, on behalf of the European Eco Forum and the Guta Environmental Law Association

Chair, distinguished delegates,

We would like to use this opportunity to bring to your attention the latest developments under the Escazú Agreement. As you may know, the Escazú Agreement held its COP3 on April 22-24, 2024, with significant results. The agreement has now 16 Parties and functioning with full speed. The Rules of Procedures including the modalities for the significant participation of the public, and the Rules relating to the structure and functions of the Committee to Support Implementation and Compliance elaborated and adopted. The members of the Committee were elected and the modalities of how the Committee will function have been also prepared.

During the recent COP3, one of the most important agenda item was that the Parties approved the Action Plan on Human Rights Defenders in Environmental Matters, reinforcing the commitment to recognize, protect and promote all the rights of human rights defenders in environmental matters. As it was said during the COP, this is an unprecedented road map that seeks to highlight a set of priority areas and implement strategic measures to advance towards the full and effective implementation of article 9 of the Escazú Agreement on human rights defenders in environmental matters.

The Action Plan was prepared by an open-ended Working Group with significant public participation, especially by Indigenous Peoples and local communities, coordinated by Chile, Ecuador and Saint Kitts and Nevis and subject to consideration by the 15 States Parties of the Agreement. The term for implementation is six years: from April 2024 to April 2030. In-person and virtual consultations were held between 2022 and early 2024, with valuable input from the annual forums on the subject that took place in Quito in November 2022 and in Panama City in September 2023.

The Plan is structured around four interrelated and complementary priority areas: knowledge creation; recognition; capacity-building and cooperation for national implementation of the action plan; and evaluation, follow-up and review of the action plan. Each priority area includes a set of strategic measures proposed to achieve objectives.

The Parties decided to maintain the open-ended ad hoc working group on human rights defenders in environmental matters until the CoP e held in 2030, with a new mandate to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the measures included in the Action Plan and to report to the Conference of the Parties. They also decided to continue holding the forums on human rights defenders in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, in 2025 and every two years thereafter, with recognized specialists in the field and with the assistance of the Secretariat.

The Parties and all countries of the region were invited to help to implement the Action Plan and to step up their efforts to develop and strengthen all necessary measures at the national level to ensure the rights of human rights defenders in environmental matters.

Earlier it was discussed in the meetings of the Aarhus Convention Working Group of Parties, and also raised in MOPs that the Aarhus Convention and the Escazú Agreement should cooperate, and some priority areas were also identified to this end, including the issue of environmental defenders, the experiences of the Compliance Committee, the task forces, etc. Though there are some differences in the approach between the two agreements on some issues, e.g. on how the protection of
environmental defenders is to be ensured, it is beneficial to share the experiences and learn from each other.

Since the past discussions no concrete initiatives have been taken since, though we appreciate that the Secretariat keeps contact with ECLAC and shares the Aarhus experience. There could be also projects implemented by some Parties or by CSOs, and it would be useful to have more information about these.

We propose to look into the possibility of discussing a more concrete plan for the cooperation between the two agreements, in the next WGoP meeting or at the MOP, - where it definitely should be on the agenda, - and then start the implementation of concrete initiatives, after the next MOP.

Thank you for the attention!