

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

Geneva, 2-4 July 2024

Item 4 (a) (i) Thematic session on access to justice

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Ensuring fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, in environmental policies is a fundamental principle that we must uphold. Access to justice is a critical component of this principle, enabling communities to defend their rights and hold violators accountable.

Environmental defenders often face significant challenges, particularly in regions like North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey. In North Macedonia, defenders advocating for sustainable practices and the preservation of natural resources frequently encounter legal and institutional barriers. These barriers hinder their ability to effectively participate in decision-making processes and seek redress for environmental harms. Similarly, in Serbia, defenders opposing the mining industry face substantial opposition and risks as they strive to protect their land and communities from exploitation.

The situation in Turkey, especially in the IDA mountain region, exemplifies the severe consequences of inadequate access to justice. The extensive land destruction caused by the mining industry has resulted in significant environmental degradation, affecting local ecosystems and communities. Despite the clear evidence of harm, affected populations struggle to have their voices heard and their grievances addressed.

The experiences of these regions highlight the urgent need for robust mechanisms to protect the rights of environmental defenders and ensure that all communities, particularly marginalized ones, have equitable access to justice. We must strengthen our commitment to providing legal support, resources, and platforms for meaningful participation, thereby empowering those who are most impacted by environmental decisions.

By addressing these issues, we can work towards a more just and sustainable future, where every individual has the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from environmental policies that safeguard our planet.