



Convention on Access to Information,  
Public Participation in Decision-making and  
Access to Justice in Environmental Matters  
(Aarhus Convention)

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe  
Palais des Nations, 8-14 avenue de la Paix  
CH - 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland  
Email: Aarhus-EnvDefenders@un.org

**Michel Forst**  
**UN Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders under the Aarhus Convention**

**Statement regarding the four-year prison sentence imposed on Mr. Daniel Shaw for his involvement in peaceful environmental protest in the United Kingdom**

Ref: ACSR/C/2024/26 (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)

Today marks a dark day for peaceful environmental protest, the protection of environmental defenders and indeed anyone concerned with the exercise of their fundamental freedoms in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (“United Kingdom”).

Today, at Southwark Crown Court, Mr. Daniel Shaw was sentenced to four years in prison for his involvement in peaceful environmental protest. This follows two requests I have made to the government of the United Kingdom to respect Mr. Shaw’s rights under the [Aarhus Convention](#) and international human rights law: first in my [letter of allegation](#) of 12 March 2024, and second in my [public statement](#) of 24 June 2024 at the start of Mr. Shaw and his co-defendants’ criminal trial. It also follows my decision to personally attend the trial of Mr. Shaw on 4 and 5 July 2024, in light of my grave concerns regarding the potential outcome of the trial for Mr. Shaw personally as well as anyone considering joining peaceful protest in the United Kingdom in the future.

The gravity of today’s sentencing decision becomes glaringly obvious when considering the act for which Mr. Shaw has been sentenced: Mr. Shaw participated in a Zoom call that discussed climate change and the organizing of a peaceful environmental protest. This is the factual basis for Mr. Shaw’s conviction and sentence for “conspiracy to cause a public nuisance”. Put differently, today’s ruling by Judge Hehir at Southwark Crown Court means that, in the United Kingdom, participation in a Zoom call that discusses peaceful protest – in Mr. Shaw’s case, to call for an end to the continued issuance of oil and gas licenses in the United Kingdom – exposes the participants of the call to the risk of a lengthy prison sentence. How a sentence of this magnitude can be either reasonable, proportional or serve a legitimate public purpose is beyond comprehension.

As I have repeatedly reminded the United Kingdom, it is, however, precisely these criteria that need to be met to show that a sanction imposed on an environmental defender like Mr. Shaw does not amount to penalization in violation of article 3 (8) of the Aarhus Convention.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Shaw’s four-year sentence falls strikingly short of meeting this standard.

Importantly, this sentence comes after the 113 days in prison on remand that Mr. Shaw has already served and the draconian bail conditions which he was subjected to for over one and a half years while awaiting trial – measures which, on their own, may amount to penalization in violation of article 3 (8) of the Aarhus Convention and already prompted me to raise concerns with the United Kingdom government in [March](#) this year.

What happened to Mr. Shaw today is unacceptable, both from a legal and a societal standpoint. A young man has been sent to prison for four years due to his decision to come together with others to discuss how to prompt government action through entirely peaceful means to address the serious threats posed by the climate crisis. This sentence should shock the conscience of any member of the public. It should also put all of us on high alert on the state of civic rights and freedoms in the United Kingdom. One must ask what comes next when an individual like Mr. Shaw who sought to exercise his right to peacefully raise his concerns about the existential threats posed by the climate crisis and the failure of his own government to take adequate steps in response is treated like a serious criminal and put behind bars for four years. Rulings like today’s set a very dangerous precedent, not just for

---

<sup>1</sup> Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee’s findings on communication [ACCC/C/2014/102 \(Belarus\)](#), ECE/MP.PP/C.1/2017/19, para. 107.

environmental protest but any form of peaceful protest that may, at one point or another, not align with the interests of the government of the day.

Given the gravity of the situation, I urge the new United Kingdom government, with absolute urgency and without undo delay, to take all necessary steps to ensure that Mr. Shaw's sentence is reduced in line with the United Kingdom's obligations under the Aarhus Convention. I underline once again that, prior to his conviction, Mr. Shaw already spent 113 days in a prison cell on remand for the same Zoom call, in itself a highly draconian and deeply questionable measure against someone who participated in a call on peaceful environmental protest. I will remain deeply engaged with Mr. Shaw's case until I see concrete action by the United Kingdom to protect Mr. Shaw's rights as an environmental defender.

18 July 2024