



Aarhus Convention 28th WGP

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2 July 2024, Agenda item 1:

Dear Chair, dear Secretariat and dear Delegates and colleagues,

Before we all begin to discuss details and procedures, I would like to highlight the context in which we hold this week's meeting.

Firstly, we believe that environmental protection must be seen as a security concern. Across the UNECE region, armed conflict is a reality, not least with the ongoing Russian war and aggression in Ukraine. This war has undisputed and unbearable environmental consequences which endanger and impact non-combatants' lives today and for decades to come. Globally, environmental disasters and scarcity are increasing the risk for conflict in the world. We need to start looking at the protection of the environment as a security interest.

Secondly, we are noticing worrying regressive and repressive trends across many Aarhus Convention parties. These findings are corroborated by Special Rapporteur Forst in his work. Various laws targeting civil society directly and indirectly, such as those labelling entities as foreign agents, have recently been adopted in Kyrgyzstan and Georgia, and are being contemplated in Bosnia and Herzegovina in Republica Srpska, as well as in some EU countries. Appalling and disproportionate treatment of environmental defenders are also being seen in countries such as the UK, France, and Germany. Civil Society is particularly worried about its potential exclusion and oppression leading up to and during the next climate COP in Azerbaijan.

This is why, we would like to, thirdly, call upon all parties to implement the Convention in good faith. After 25 years in force, we are noticing numerous parties dragging its full implementation, including through delay tactics in front of the ACCC by the EU, and considerable backsliding in the UK, Ireland, Austria, and Hungary just to name a few. The Convention is not an aspirational text but is international law which needs to be implemented in full respect of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. So we also are keen to hear from Parties this week about the measures and solutions they are putting forward to honour their obligations under the Aarhus Convention.

Lastly, we are holding this meeting against the backdrop of an ongoing lack of funding, specifically for the Compliance Mechanism. Defunding or not enhancing funding in proportion with workload and mandate, not only frustrates the tools of the Convention, but also raises the perception that some are looking for ways to weaken scrutiny upon themselves.



All of you delegates here answer to your own ministries and governments but you also answer to the international rule of law, and we will all answer to future generations. We hope that you can keep our messages in mind in the next few days and take them home with you when national priorities are next being discussed.

Thank you for the floor and we look forward to fruitful discussions.