



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

Agenda item 4(b): Access to information

July 2024

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Thank you, Chair. I speak on behalf of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Access to information is a widely recognized human right, essential for people to be able to protect and defend their human rights from potentially harmful environmental impact. It is guaranteed in Articles 4 and 5 of the Aarhus Convention, as well as in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It is also generally understood to constitute one of the critical elements of the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, recognised by the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly.

However, as highlighted by the Task Force on Access to Information, challenges remain in the implementation of this right, including, among others, a weak collection of environmental information routinely and in case of emergencies, the application of restrictions on access to environmental information, insufficient monitoring and timeliness of processing information requests, and unmet needs of groups in vulnerable situations, including women, children and youth, persons with disabilities.

It is necessary that States strengthen their efforts to respect, protect and fulfil the right of all people to access to accurate, reliable, and timely environmental information, including about the causes, effects and actual and potential sources of climate and environmental harm, adaptive responses, relevant climate and environmental legislation, regulations, findings from climate and environmental impact assessments, and policies. This includes budgetary information – at both national and sub-national levels. Detailed information on expenses related to environmental action as well as on revenues generated through environmental taxes and fees is essential for enabling effective public oversight and meaningful participation. This transparency ensures that right-holders can hold their governments accountable and actively engage in environmental governance.

Dissemination methods should be appropriate to age and capacities and aimed at overcoming obstacles, such as illiteracy, disability, language barriers, distance and limited access to information and communications technology. States should take additional measures to protect the rights of those who are already in vulnerable situations, or at particular risk from environmental harm, including Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, women, children and youth.

Thank you.