

Aarhus Convention

28th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties, Geneva, 2-4 July 2024

Statement delivered by Isabelle Kolebinov (CRIN), on behalf of the WG on children's rights and the environment under

Item 7: Preparations for the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties (a) Future work programme

Timing: Wednesday 3 July, 5.10–6 p.m.

Check against delivery

This statement is delivered on behalf of CRIN, the Child Rights International Network, as well as of Child Rights Connect's working group on children's rights and the environment.

Children and young people are affected by environmental issues. All over the world, many are standing up and taking action to stop violations of their environmental rights and further climate breakdown.

National laws and policies should protect children when they speak up and seek justice. The Aarhus Convention is a great avenue to use to make sure that States protect, respect and fulfil children's rights when it comes to access to information, public participation and access to justice and remedies in environmental matters.

Indeed, all three pillars of the Convention are relevant to children and their rights. Therefore, we would like to take the opportunity of this meeting to encourage States Parties to mainstream children's rights across the three pillars of the Convention in their future work programme, as requested by the UN Secretary General in his guidance note on children's rights mainstreaming.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most ratified convention in the world, is relevant to the environmental issue and has been signed by all country parties to the Aarhus Convention. States, as signatories, have obligations to respect children's rights in this context. The Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment 26 on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change is a useful tool for States to make sure that laws and policies uphold children's rights in environmental matters. General Comment 26 makes it clear that all three pillars of the Aarhus Convention are relevant to children.

On access to information, the Committee states that *"Access to information is essential for enabling children (...) to comprehend the potential effects of environmental harm on children's rights (...) [and] "is a prerequisite for realising the rights of children to express their views, to be heard and to effective remedy regarding environmental matters"*.

On participatory rights, it further states that *"[a]t the international level, States, intergovernmental organisations and international non-governmental organisations should facilitate the involvement of children in environmental decision-making processes, including in negotiations and the implementation of instruments of international environmental law."*

Finally, when it comes to access to justice and remedies, the CRC Committee also notes the numerous barriers that children, due to their status, encounter, which limits their means of asserting their rights in the environmental context. In this regard, it highlights that *"States should provide*

access to justice pathways for children, including compliant mechanisms that are child-friendly, gender-responsive and disability-inclusive, to ensure their engagement with effective judicial, quasi-judicial and non-judicial mechanisms, (...) for violations of their rights relating to environmental harm”.

With this, we want to urge States parties to the Aarhus Convention to mainstream children’s rights throughout the three pillars of the Convention and within the future work programme by:

- a. Developing child-friendly information, including by considering the development of a child-friendly version of the Convention as recommended by the Task Force on Access to Information;
- b. Encouraging children’s participation at national as well as international levels by creating enabling and safe spaces for children to exercise their right to be heard and to ensure that their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly are respected.
- c. Removing barriers for children to initiate proceedings in environmental matters themselves as recommended by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

I thank you for your attention.