

**28th Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention
(Geneva 2-4. July 2024)**

Agenda Item 6 (a)(ii): Rapid response mechanism

Norway

Thank you Chair,

We are facing grave challenges due to loss of biodiversity, increased pollution and global warming. They are all caused by human activity and can only be solved by humans. Environmental human rights defenders are essential agents of change.

The protection of human rights defenders is an important priority for Norway. I reiterate Norway's full support for environmental human rights defenders around the world, and their safety and protection.

Environmental human rights defenders should be viewed as a resource, not a threat. Recognising their positive and legitimate role is in itself an important step towards better protection.

The situation of environmental human rights defenders may be challenging also within Parties to the Convention.

The establishment of the rapid response mechanism with a Special Rapporteur for the protection of environmental defenders at the last Meeting of the Parties to the Convention was an important step towards much needed strengthening of their protection and for the advancement of environmental democracy.

The effect of the mechanism on the safety and protection of environmental human rights defenders exercising their rights under the Aarhus Convention depends on its use by the defenders, the respect of the Parties for the mechanism and the work of the Special Rapporteur.

We therefore commend Michel Forst for the work he has done so far as the first Special Rapporteur to put the mechanism into practice and enable it to make a difference by increasing the protection for environmental human rights defenders. We commend him for his efforts to carry out dialogue with and engage both the public, including environmental defenders themselves, the private sector and the parties.

We note that the Special Rapporteur is currently corresponding with several parties concerning complaints from environmental defenders, including Norway. We note that some of the cases giving rise to this correspondence may raise questions with regard to the interpretation of the scope of Article 3(8) and the mandate of the Special Rapporteur. We thank the Special Rapporteur and the Secretariat for clarifying their interpretation of the mandate and the reasoning behind it. We also note that some of this concerns similar issues linked to the question of whether protests are peaceful and thus protected from restrictions or consequences or not. We also followed with interest the Open Dialogue Session with the Special Rapporteur during lunch-time today.

As for the financial situation we refer to our previous intervention under the Agenda item concerning the Compliance Committee.

Thank you Chair