

Грамадскае аб'яднанне
"Экадом"

220088, г. Мінск, вул. Захарова, 50В-6Н

е-mail: ecohome.by@gmail.com
тэл.: (017) 396-94-31
факс: (017) 399-38-28
р/р ВУ51ММВН30150069300109330000
у ААТ "Банк Дабрабыт" код ММВНВУ22, Мінск
УНН 101127301; АКПА 37411927



Общественное объединение
"Экодом"

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

aarhus.compliance@unece.org

Ecohome NGO's comments on the implementation by Belarus of Decision VI/8c of the Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Aarhus Convention in the framework of the Second Progress Report

for the Compliance Committee 66th meeting

Ecohome NGO expresses appreciation for the opportunity to comment on the [Second progress review of the implementation of decision VI/8c on compliance by Belarus with its obligations under the Aarhus Convention](#).

We thank the Committee for the thorough and detailed preparation of the Review and we support all the conclusions and recommendations presented by it.

Ecohome NGO explicit deep concern and disappointment that the Party concerned has not yet progressed in the implementation of the Recommendations. More than 2.5 years have passed since the adoption of Decision VI / 8c and most of the recommendations contained therein repeat the Recommendations of past decisions: Decisions V / 9c for the Ostrovets NPP of 2014 and Decision IV/ 9b for the Neman Hydroelectric Power Station of 2011. Therefore, Belarus had a sufficiently long time not only to fully implement all the recommendations, but at least to demonstrate any relevant and sufficient steps taken to implement them.

We also believe that the issue of prosecution of activists exercising their rights under the Convention is quite serious and requires special attention. Both the Ministry of Natural Resources and local authorities and other ministries, especially the Ministry of Internal Affairs and state security agencies, must take all relevant steps to prevent such prosecutions.

But on this issue, we note not only the lack of progress, but also the ongoing practice of persecution and harassment of activists in Brest who exercise their environmental rights (*Annex 1*). Throughout 2 years, local activists applied for holding 294 rallies, 12 pickets and 16 demonstrations on the issues related to the construction of the battery plant, however, only 1 mass meeting in 2018 was allowed by local authorities.

Also, until now, individual measures aimed at restoring the rights of Andrei Ozharovsky, Irina Sukhiy, Tatsiana Novikova, and Mikhail Matskevich have not been taken (which confirms the letter of the Department of Citizenship and Migration of 03/09/2020) (*Annex 2*).

We deeply regret that we do not see for the entire period since the adoption of Decision VI / 8c that the Party concerned has demonstrated at least some steps aimed directly at implementing the recommendations. We cannot indicate at least some progress from Belarus in this direction.

We support the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee in full.

We consider essential:

that Belarus provides an earlier interim report on the steps taken than 10/01/2020, especially considering that the Ministry of Natural Resources wrote earlier [that a national action plan has been developed](#).

for the Committee to reconsider the question of the steps taken and the implementation by Belarus of the Decision at the next meeting.

Executive director

Marina Dubina