

**UNECE****United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

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Geneva, 10 June 2008

Parties to the world's most far-reaching treaty on public participation and environmental rights meet in Latvia

11-13 June 2008

Reval Hotel Latvija, Riga, Latvia

The Parties to the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters will hold their third meeting in Riga from 11 to 13 June 2008, marking the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention.

Developed under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Aarhus Convention is widely viewed as the world's most far-reaching treaty on public participation and environmental rights.

Drawing on the experience of the first decade, the Meeting is expected to adopt the "Riga Declaration" and a long-term strategic plan which will chart the future path of the Convention in the coming years.

Among the key topics on the agenda are:

- **Implementation and compliance:** a set of thirty-five national reports on implementation will be reviewed, providing an opportunity for all concerned to see whether and how the Convention is applied in practice. The Meeting will also consider the findings of the Convention's independent Compliance Committee that six of the treaty's forty-one parties – Albania, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Turkmenistan and Ukraine – have failed to comply with certain provisions of the Convention. This will be undertaken on the basis of findings and recommendations of the Compliance Committee made in the period 2005 – 2008 and could result in measures addressing non-compliance being adopted by the Meeting of the Parties. It will be the second test of the Convention's compliance mechanism, which is unique in that any member of the public having concerns about a Party's compliance with the Convention may trigger a process of formal review by the Committee.
- The interpretation of the provision governing the entry into force of the amendment on **genetically modified organisms (GMOs)**: the Meeting will consider proposals to calculate the number of Parties needed for entry into force of the amendment to the Convention, which aims to extend the rights of the public to participate in decision-making on GMOs.

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- **Pollutant release and transfer registers:** the Parties will urge Signatories to the Convention's Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to ratify the Protocol in order to bring about the instrument's entry into force by 2009. Twenty-nine European countries are expected to release national pollutant register reports in 2009 in line with the requirements of the Protocol, giving a comprehensive picture across most of Europe of the release of substances with the potential to have a significant impact on the environment and public health.
- A decision to further promote **the principles of the Aarhus Convention in other international environment-related forums:** the Convention has led to greater transparency and accountability in a wide range of international bodies and processes dealing with environmental issues on which the Parties to the Convention have an influence. The Parties will debate how to promote further the principles underlying the Convention outside the UNECE region.

Mr. Marek Belka, Executive Secretary of UNECE, will deliver a welcome address during the opening ceremony of the high-level segment of the Meeting on Friday, 13 June 2008. This high-level segment will feature three panel discussions, during which Ministers, distinguished speakers from international organizations and leading representatives of civil society will exchange views on topics of key relevance to the Convention.

For further information, please contact:

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