

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

Press Release ECE/ENV/04/P13
Geneva, 7 September 2004

**AARHUS HITS THIRTY:
Finland becomes 30th Party to environmental rights treaty**

Finland has become the latest country to ratify the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). Following on the heels of ratifications by the Czech Republic and Slovenia, this brings the total number of Parties to the Convention to thirty.¹

The Aarhus Convention is the world's most far-reaching treaty on environmental rights. It seeks to promote greater transparency and accountability among government bodies by guaranteeing public rights of access to environmental information, providing for public involvement in environmental decision-making and requiring the establishment of procedures enabling the public to challenge environmental decisions.

The Convention was adopted in Aarhus, Denmark, in June 1998, and signed by 39 European countries and the European Community. It entered into force in October 2001 and its Parties now include most of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and slightly more than half of the EU member States. The European Community itself is preparing for ratification and is currently negotiating the necessary implementing legislation.

¹ Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovenia, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan and Ukraine.

Mr. Kaj Bärlund, Director of the UNECE Environment and Human Settlements Division, himself a former Finnish Environment Minister, expressed satisfaction at the Finnish ratification and more generally at the rate of progress in ratification of the Convention: "With each new ratification, the prospects for citizens to play a meaningful role in shaping their environment increase. With the number of Aarhus Parties hitting the 30 mark, there is now an impressive core of countries that have made a binding commitment to environmental democracy. Indeed, the UNECE countries which are not yet Parties to the Convention are now clearly in the minority."²

For further information, please visit www.unece.org/env/pp or contact:

Mr. Jeremy WATES,
Secretary to the Aarhus Convention
UNECE Environment and Human Settlements Division
Palais des Nations
CH - 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Phone: +41 (0)22 917 23 84
Fax: +41 (0)22 917 01 07
E-mail: jeremy.wates@unece.org

² The UNECE region encompasses the whole of Europe and five Central Asian countries, as well as Canada, Israel and the United States.