

FOURTEENTH MEETING OF THE BUREAU OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE AARHUS CONVENTION

**Palais des Nations, Geneva
2 May 2007**

Attendance:

Bureau members: Ms. Hanne Inger Bjurstrøm (Chair, Norway) supported by Ms Mona Aarhus (Norway), Mr. Mail Nuriyev (Azerbaijan), Ms. Maud Istasse (Belgium), Ms. Giuliana Gasparini (Vice-Chair, Italy), Ms. Evita Stanga handing over to Ms. Zaneta Mikosa (Latvia), Ms. Elzbieta Kur (Poland).

NGO Observer: Mr. John Hontelez (European Environmental Bureau representing European ECO Forum).

Apologies: Mr. Alzhan Braliev (Vice-Chair, Kazakhstan)

I. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted

II. Preparation of the 7th Meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (WGP-7)

1. Status of ratification

As stated in the annotated agenda for WGP-7, the Chair intended to invite the Parties to report on the status of ratification of the Convention, PRTR Protocol and the GMO amendment at the WGP-7. Among other things, such an overview would help to give an indication as to the likelihood of being able to hold the first meeting of the Parties to the PRTR Protocol in June 2008 back-to-back with the upcoming third meeting of the Parties to the Convention.

2. PRTR

The secretariat reported on the meeting of the Working Group on PRTR which took place on 14-16 February 2007. The report of the meeting was available under the symbol number ECE/MP.PP/AC.1/2007/2. The contact group set up to draft rules of procedure and a compliance review mechanism for the Protocol was scheduled to meet on 18-19 June 2007 and was aiming to finalize the two draft decisions with a view to presenting them to the WG on PRTR in October. The WG on PRTR had invited the delegations to submit their comments on the two drafts by 15 May 2007.

The Bureau took note of this information and agreed that the meeting of the WGP would provide a good opportunity to remind the delegations of this invitation and the deadline.

3. Genetically modified organisms (GMO)

The secretariat reported on the steps taken with regard to clarifying the conditions for the entry into force of amendments. It had finalized a document analyzing the options for clarification of

article 14 of the Convention and had sent it on 20 April 2007 for commenting to the legal group electronic list offering a seven-week commenting period. The Bureau noted that it would not make sense to discuss the substance of the document at WGP-7, given that it had only been distributed shortly in advance of the meeting and only in one language, but decided that apart from the timing of the WGP's consideration of the issue, the procedure agreed at WGP-6 (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2006/2, para. 20) should be followed.

The Bureau also discussed the question of the expert workshop on access to information, public participation and access to justice in the field of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) on the basis of an outline proposal prepared by the secretariat at the request of the Chair. It confirmed its earlier intention to hold the workshop back-to-back with the Cartagena CoP/MoP to enable more effective participation of all the relevant experts and to facilitate stronger links between the two treaties. The secretariat informed the Bureau that Germany's GMO experts had expressed some reservations about hosting such a workshop in Germany back-to-back with the Cartagena CoP/MoP. The possibility of alternative venues was briefly discussed.

The Bureau agreed to invite the WGP to comment on the outline proposal for the workshop with a view to presenting the final draft at WGP-8. It also mandated the Chair and secretariat to consult with the Netherlands, as the donor for the workshop, concerning the outline proposal during the meeting.¹

4. Public Participation in Strategic Decision-making (PPSD)

The secretariat informed the Bureau that Austria had kindly offered funds for the workshop and was involved in its preparations. The Bureau agreed to invite Austrian representative to present the relevant developments to the WGP.

5. Reporting Requirements and Compliance Mechanism

The Chair drew the attention of the Bureau members to the Guidance Document on reporting requirements prepared by the Compliance Committee (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2007/L.7). The Bureau agreed to recommend that the WGP endorse the guidance.

6. Capacity Building

The secretariat drew the Bureau's attention to document ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2007/L.5 which presented a detailed updated overview of capacity-building activities, priorities and lessons learned in the implementation of capacity-building activities. The Bureau took note of the information. The Chair pointed out that capacity building is among the most important items of the work plan.

7. Electronic Information Tools

The secretariat presented the outcome of the fifth meeting of the Task Force on Electronic Information Tools (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2007/L.3) and the summary of responses to a questionnaire on the implementation of Decision II/3 on Electronic Information Tools

¹ As the Netherlands was not represented at WGP-7, this consultation took place electronically.

(ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2007/L.3/Add.2). It also reported on the two capacity-building workshops which were being organized and on further development of the clearinghouse. The Bureau took note of the information.

8. Access to Justice

The secretariat informed the Bureau about the high-level judicial training event on access to justice which was being planned under the auspices of the Task Force. The workshop would take place on 4-6 June in Kiev and would bring together senior members of the judiciary from six EECCA countries. The next Task Force meeting was scheduled to take place in September 2007. The secretariat and the Chair of the Task Force were discussing the possibility of organizing a one-day mini-conference addressing main challenges in access to justice in the conjunction with or as part of the Task Force meeting.

9. Long Term Strategic Plan (LTSP)

The Bureau discussed the latest steps taken in the development of the LTSP, including the draft elements developed by the Expert Group on LTSP and the ongoing public consultation process (through the Convention's website). As comments from the public and other stakeholders were continuing to come in, the Bureau agreed to a proposal from the Chair (who had consulted with the Chair of the Expert Group) to extend the consultation process until the end of May 2007. It also discussed the upcoming meeting of the Expert Group in Rome in June 2007. The Bureau recalled the LTSP development process set up at WGP-6 (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2006/2, paras. 70-71). In this regard, it expected to receive the draft elements from the expert group in June 2007 with a view to preparing a draft LTSP at its meeting on 19 June 2007. The Bureau's draft would be submitted as a basis for discussion at WGP-8. The comments received at WGP-8 would then be reflected in the draft LTSP and a revised draft would be presented at WGP-9 in February 2008.

The Bureau agreed that the Chair would inform the WGP-7 about the recent developments in the process and would point out that the primary opportunity for the WGP to discuss the substance of the LTSP would be at WGP-8 and WGP-9, without however ruling out the possibility for delegations to provide substantive comments at WGP-7 if they so wished.

10. Public Participation in International Forums (PPIF)

The Bureau reviewed the draft programme of the PPIF workshop scheduled for June 2007, the details of which had been developed further by the Chair of the Bureau and the Chair of the Task Force on PPIF with the assistance of the secretariat.

It also discussed the establishment of a procedure through which Parties and other stakeholders would be invited to submit to the PPIF Task Force comments with regard to their experience in implementation of the Almaty Guidelines, in accordance with Decision II/4, paragraph 7. It noted the importance of the relevant sections in the forthcoming national implementation reports to be submitted by the Parties but considered that Decision II/4 implied a more specific commenting process. It agreed to recommend to the WGP to invite Parties and other stakeholders to provide

such information to the secretariat by 1 October 2007, for review by the Task Force at its third meeting (8-9 November 2007).

With regard to review of the Guidelines, the Bureau agreed that this did not necessarily entail their revision. It agreed to recommend to the WGP to invite the Task Force to assist the WGP in reviewing the Guidelines and making recommendations, as appropriate, for consideration at MoP-3, pursuant to decision II/4 (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2006/2, paras. 70-71).

11. Financial report

The secretariat highlighted the most important issues of the financial report, which it would present to the WGP-7.

The Bureau noted that while overall there was an increase in contributions, the income received was still below the estimated core requirement and significantly below the overall requirement. Most of the contributions usually came in towards the end of a calendar year, thus posing difficulties for the overall planning of work, including staffing. Due to this and to the need for an increase in the balance of funds, the expenditures had been kept below the level of income.

The Bureau considered that the shortfall was not sufficient to justify cutting elements out of the work programme, but that some activities might need to be deferred, i.e. the situation would be managed by stretching out the work programme. It was hoped the tour-de-table during WGP-7 where Parties would be invited to indicate their shares and contributions for year would give a clear picture of the situation.

12. Financial arrangements

The Bureau agreed that the Chair would present to WGP-7 its note outlining four options for financial arrangements and would invite the WGP to identify the most appropriate options with a view to their further development and discussion at WGP-8.

13. Third Meeting of the Parties (MoP)

The representatives of Latvia reported on the latest preparations for MoP-3. The MOP will be held on 8 – 13 June 2008. The Bureau discussed the question of a draft programme for the meeting. Noting that the MoP would more or less coincide with the 10th anniversary of the Convention, the Bureau agreed to ask the Parties for comments on the relevant elements of the draft programme. It noted that a discussion at a ministerial level would be appropriate.

14. Belgrade Conference

The secretariat reported on the preparation of two side-events at the Sixth Ministerial 'Environment for Europe' Conference (Belgrade, 10-12 October 2007): one on the Convention and one on PRTR Protocol. It also reported on the development by UNECE of a paper on the implementation of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements, to which the Bureau had previously provided input. The Bureau considered the document and noted that it did not address

some of the issues raised by the Bureau in its earlier comments on the document, such as the issue of the compliance review under the Convention. It agreed to communicate this concern to the UNECE secretariat.

III. Next Bureau Meeting

The Bureau agreed to hold its next meeting on 19 June 2007.