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To: <public.participation@unece.org>
cc: "Hana Rubin" <rubin@itto.or.jp>
Subject: Attn: Ms. Hanne Inger Bjurstrom/Mr. Jeremy Wates

Dear Ms. Inger Bjurstrom,

Thank you for your letter to Dr. Sobral of 16 June regarding the Aarhus Convention. I am responding on behalf of Dr. Sobral. Please find ITTO's response to the questionnaire attached to your letter below. ITTO is happy to participate in the review of the Almaty Guidelines. We will also inform the International Tropical Timber Council at its next meeting (November 6-10) about the existence of the Guidelines and the consultation process. In principle ITTO is interested in participating in the proposed workshop to review the outcomes of the consultation process, but this will depend on the availability of staff and financial resources to fund the travel. Please try to advise us well in advance of the planned dates for the workshop.

Best regards,

Steve Johnson

Communications Manager

ITTO

Questionnaire answers

1. The Guidelines are a good attempt to institutionalize public participation in international processes. It may be difficult to secure resources to allow proper representation from developing countries (this is a problem faced by ITTO).
2. ITTO has a general policy that all technical publications of the organization are to be made generally available. Only financial and a few other administrative documents are restricted to members only. Limited translation budgets mean that despite this openness, not all documents can be accessed by all. It is relatively easy to register as an observer to attend ITTO meetings, and only one public observer organization (from Taiwan Province) has ever been denied access to an ITTO meeting. However, the cost of attending meetings is a significant barrier to broad participation from developing country organizations/individuals. ITTO also has well-established Trade and Civil Society Advisory Groups whose members provide inputs to the International Tropical Timber Council on its work program relevant to their interest areas. Also, ITTO has a policy of allowing anyone admitted to its open meetings to contribute under any agenda item. There is also a regular Council agenda item on inputs from observers.
3. See above.
4. ITTO has recently upgraded its website (www.itto.or.jp), and is in the process of developing French, Spanish and Japanese versions. These language versions of the website, in addition to the re-designed English site (which contains all ITTO documents and information), will greatly increase access to information on the organization's work.
5. Main challenges are as indicated above: funding and adequate representation. The level of general public interest in the work of ITTO and in tropical forests in general has fluctuated over the life of the organization, leading to quite different desires and levels of public participation. When funds are provided to allow participation, it is important to try to verify that groups/individuals invited actually represent an indicated interest group. It is also useful to rotate support for participation in meetings rather than always supporting the same entities.