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Statement

by

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United Nations Under-Secretary-General

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at the

**ECLAC Side event at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
2018:**

“ENVIRONMENTAL DEMOCRACY FOR SUSTAINABLE SOCIETIES “

11 July 2018, 6:30 pm – 8 pm

ECOSOC Chamber, UNHQ

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,
Dear colleagues and dear Alicia,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be here on behalf of UNECE today, the Economic Commission for Europe. This is a happy day: we are celebrating the birth of the new Escazú Agreement. This gathering is a strong reminder that environmental democracy is of global relevance.

It is no coincidence that we are joined today by the representatives of two UNECE member States, France and Italy. Both countries have been important advocates for the Aarhus Convention and its principles, in several regions and globally. Let me warmly thank you for your tireless efforts.

Since its adoption in 1998, the Aarhus Convention has been a model for the application of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. Twenty years later, the Convention still demonstrates how environmental democracy can help sustainable management of resources; promote transboundary cooperation; and lay the foundations for peaceful, inclusive and just societies.

Testimonies by Governments and stakeholders showcase success stories in different countries in the UNECE region. The Convention: (i) brought more transparency; (ii) increased participatory approaches, with free access to information becoming a standard practice; and (iii) there is also a growing use of administrative and court procedures by the public.

At the same time, the 20 year anniversary of the Aarhus Convention serves as a reminder of the importance of democratic values. Many societies are moving away from them towards greater restrictions on civil liberties. Environmental activists are increasingly the targets of repressive measures and retaliatory actions. It is crucial that people exercising their environmental rights be free from fear. In this regard, I particularly commend the adoption of the Budva Declaration at the Sixth Session of the Meeting of the Parties last year in Montenegro, which addressed this critical issue. It also demonstrated Governments' strong commitment to promote environmental democracy throughout the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

Today, I am very pleased to say: we are not alone anymore. The Escazú Agreement is the best gift that the Aarhus Convention could have for its Twentieth Anniversary.

Both the Escazú Agreement and the Aarhus Convention provide solid legal frameworks and international standards for promoting transparency, good governance, participatory decision-making and the rule of law, which are at the heart of sustainable development. These treaties are effective tools at the service of Governments and civil society to further SDGs, in particular SDG 16.

I would like to conclude by congratulating Governments and civil society in the Latin America and the Caribbean region and our sister organization – ECLAC – on their remarkable achievement – the Escazú Agreement. Your tremendous work illustrates the value of environmental democracy in practice. UNECE stands ready to continue our close collaboration with ECLAC also during the next steps of bringing the Regional Agreement to Life.

I also would like to take this opportunity and invite countries from other regions to join the Aarhus Convention. Let us all unite in our efforts to transform our world into a more sustainable and prosperous place for generations to come.

Thank you.
