

**Welcome address
by**

**Ms. Olga Algayerova
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Executive Secretary
of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

at

**JOINT HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT
OF THE MEETINGS OF THE PARTIES
TO THE CONVENTION ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION,
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE
IN ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS AND ITS PROTOCOL ON POLLUTANT
RELEASE AND TRANSFER REGISTERS**

**14 September 2017
Budva, Montenegro**

His Excellency, Prime Minister of Montenegro, Mr. Duško Marković
His Excellency, Minister of Sustainable Development and Tourism of Montenegro, Mr. Pavle Radulovic,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address the Meetings of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers.

I am particularly honoured to convey to you the congratulations of the Secretary-General of the United Nations along with his best wishes for a successful meeting.

This gathering of high-level representatives from Governments, civil society and other stakeholders from the UNECE and other regions is a strong reminder that environmental democracy is of global relevance. The Aarhus Convention and its Protocol are model examples of the application of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. They demonstrate how environmental democracy can promote transparency and transboundary cooperation; how it can help environmentally-sound management of resources; and lay the foundations for peaceful, inclusive and just societies.

This meeting comes at a critical time. Many societies are moving away from democratic values and towards greater restrictions on civil and political liberties. Journalists and 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 your efforts to protect environmental activists and whistle-blowers against harassment and persecution.

Democracy, good governance and the rule of law are at the heart of sustainable development. They are also prerequisites for addressing cross-cutting global challenges, such as climate change, environmental impacts on health, exposure to chemicals and availability of clean water. All stakeholders must work together if we want to overcome these challenges. This is why the Convention and its Protocol promote wide involvement of NGOs, the private sector, the public at large and other stakeholders in environmental decision-making, alongside the government. In doing so, they support member States' progress towards global commitments, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Furthermore, your successes have been a source of inspiration for other regions. I am happy to note that a similar initiative replicating the "Aarhus principles" is well under way in the region of the Latin America and the Caribbean.

In the years to come, we should use every opportunity to shape a better world for future generations. For this to happen, we must embrace the principles of transparency, accountability and just societies enshrined in both the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol, as they are paramount for the daily lives and well-being of all people.

Your work is illustrative of the value of environmental democracy. We should all be encouraged by your efforts to transform our world and to offer our children a more sustainable and prosperous future.

Thank you.