



ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Working Group for the Preparation of the
First Meeting of the Parties to the
Convention on Access to Information,
Public Participation in Decision-making and
Access to Justice in Environmental Matters
(Second meeting, Geneva, 22-24 May 2002)

DESIGNATION OF FOCAL POINTS

1. At their first meeting (Chisinau, April 1999), the Signatories to the Convention noted the need to establish focal points and included this as an element in the work plan under the Convention (CEP/WG.5/1999/2, para. 25, and annex, para. 30). Following this, many governments and organizations designated focal points, which have been used by the secretariat for communication and dissemination of information and displayed on the Convention's web site.
2. Although it is not a requirement of the Convention – as is the case with many other multilateral environmental agreements – it is useful for a number of reasons to have clearly designated focal points dealing with issues related to the Convention. First, it helps the secretariat in its task of issuing invitations and disseminating information. Second, it provides an identifiable point of contact for the public. Third, it allows other governments to establish contact directly with the appropriate person in a given country and thereby eases the exchange of information on a State-to-State level. Finally, it can also facilitate the internal process when the national authorities know who the correct person for questions related to the Aarhus Convention is and can direct any inquiries to him or her.

3. At its first meeting, the Preparatory Working Group requested the secretariat to prepare a draft decision encouraging the designation of national focal points for the Convention (CEP/WG.5/2001/2, para. 43). A decision of the Parties could have the effect of reinforcing existing good practice and providing additional encouragement to governments or organizations which have thus far not designated focal points to do so in the future. The secretariat has prepared a draft decision as set out in the annex below.

4. In the draft decision, it is proposed that each country should designate at least one general focal point and, as appropriate, specific focal points for specific issues of the Convention, e.g. genetically modified organisms (GMOs), pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTR), access to justice, and so on. Major organizations involved in the work of the Convention, such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), European ECO Forum and the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, should also be encouraged to designate focal points to the Convention. The Convention's secretariat should immediately be notified of any change or modification to the focal point.

Annex

DRAFT DECISION I/[..]

DESIGNATION OF FOCAL POINTS

The Meeting.

Believing that the system of focal points established in accordance with the work plan of the Meeting of the Signatories has served an important function in facilitating communications concerning matters related to the Convention,

Believing also that this system should be maintained and strengthened,

1. Calls on Parties to designate national focal points for the Convention, and, as appropriate, for specific topics under its auspices, if they have not already done so, and to submit the relevant contact information to the secretariat, including any modifications or additions as they occur;
2. Invites non-Parties and interested organizations to designate focal points or contact persons for the Convention, and, as appropriate, for specific topics under its auspices, if they have not already done so, and to submit the relevant contact information to the secretariat, including any modifications or additions as they occur;
3. Requests the secretariat to maintain the list of focal points and contact persons up to date and to post it on the Convention's web site to facilitate the sharing of information.