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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE
CONVENTION ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION,
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING AND
ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

Working Group of the Parties

Seventh meeting
Geneva, 2–4 May 2007
Item 5 of the provisional agenda
Public participation in international forums

**REPORT ON THE SECOND MEETING OF THE TASK FORCE
ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL FORUMS**

1. The second meeting of the Task Force on Public Participation in International Forums established by the Meeting of the Parties through decision II/4 was held in Geneva on 9–10 November 2006.
2. The meeting was attended by experts designated by the Governments of Albania, Armenia, Belgium, Denmark, France, Georgia, Germany, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. The European Community was also represented.
3. The following international non-governmental and regional organizations were represented: European ECO-Forum, Mandat International and the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC). Within the framework of European ECO-Forum,

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the following international non-governmental organizations participated: CEE Bankwatch Network, European Environmental Bureau and Women in Europe for a Common Future. The following national non-governmental organizations also participated within the framework of European ECO-Forum: TETA "KHAZRI" (Azerbaijan), Georgian Environmental and Biological Monitoring Association (Georgia), Eco-Pravo Lviv (Ukraine), Green Dossier (Ukraine) and Union for Defense of the Sea of Amudorya (Uzbekistan).

I. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

4. The Task Force adopted the following agenda for its work:
 - (a) Adoption of the agenda
 - (b) Election of new Vice-Chair
 - (c) Consideration of the responses received from international forums to the written questionnaire
 - (d) Discussion of further steps in implementation of the workplan
 - (e) Adoption of the report and close of the meeting

II. ELECTION OF NEW VICE-CHAIR

5. Following the stepping down of Ms. Ludmila Barbaiani (Moldova), Ms. Nino Gokhelasvili (Georgia) was unanimously elected Vice-Chair.

III. CONSIDERATION OF RESPONSES TO THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

6. The secretariat briefly informed the Task Force of the steps that had been taken since the Working Group of the Parties approved the plan of consultation (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2006/2, paras. 23–29 and Add. 1 and 2). Letters from the Chair of the Meeting of the Parties had been sent out on 16 June 2006 with questionnaires to 97 forums provisionally identified as being of higher priority for consultation (Category 1 and 2). On the same date, a shorter letter without the questionnaire had been sent to 39 forums provisionally identified as being of lesser priority for consultation (Category 3). On the basis of the statistical summary of responses prepared by the secretariat, 59 forums from the higher-priority pool had responded to the invitation, 72 per cent of them expressing interest in participating in the consultation process and 28 per cent of them equally split between forums declining to participate and forums proposing to decide on their participation at a later stage. To date, 30 Category 1 and 2 forums had provided responses to the written questionnaire and a further 9 forums had indicated that they intended to do so. One response to the written questionnaire had been received from a Category 3 forum.

7. The secretariat then presented a synthesis paper summarizing the responses to the questionnaire. The paper had been prepared by the secretariat with the assistance of a consultant funded by an earmarked contribution from France as the lead country. The paper addressed:

- (a) The information contained in the responses on the relevant rules, procedures and practices of international forums and on the ways in which the future plans of the forums might affect those rules, procedures and practices;
- (b) Challenges identified in the responses;
- (c) Comments by the participating forums on the Almaty Guidelines.

8. The Task Force welcomed the synthesis paper and the other information provided. It proceeded to discuss the responses received, their implications and patterns that emerged. The Task Force expressed its satisfaction with the level and quality of responses and considered the question of the inclusion of late responses, following calls by forums that had not had time to respond but still wished to do so.

9. The Task Force agreed that the synthesis paper should be further developed and, once finalized, should be forwarded to the Working Group of the Parties. In further developing the paper, the following points should be taken into account:

- (a) The paper should be expanded in scope to become a synthesis of the responses to the written consultation process as a whole, rather than just a synthesis of responses to the questionnaire. To achieve this, a new section summarizing the content of the letters of response should be included. The statistical information on the responses should also be included.
- (b) Those practices that concern access to information regarding public participation in the forum, rather than access to environmental information, should be discussed in the section of the paper dealing with public participation instead of the section on access to information.
- (c) The section of the paper on the international forums' specific comments regarding specific provisions of the Guidelines should be in the form of a table setting out the specified provisions and the related comments.
- (d) Late responses should be incorporated into the paper as far as practicable and consistent with the goal of finalizing the paper in time for submission to the seventh meeting of the Working Group of the Parties, bearing in mind subparagraph (h) below.
- (e) The informal documents showing the status of responses in table form need not form part of the paper but should be posted on the website.
- (f) Given the length of the document, each major section of the paper should have a conclusion.
- (g) To facilitate the processing of the documentation, the paper should be disaggregated into several parts, with the principal paper summarising the outcomes of the consultation process and a number of addenda providing further detail on the responses to specific questions.
- (h) Task Force members should be involved in the further development of the paper according to the following procedure:

30 November 2006:

Secretariat to circulate revised version with expanded scope (see subparagraph (a) above)

18 December 2006:	Comments to be submitted to secretariat
8 January 2007:	Secretariat to circulate revised version for final review by the Task Force
16 January 2007:	Final comments to be submitted to the secretariat; text to be finalized by secretariat in consultation with the Bureau of the Task Force

10. During the meeting, the secretariat prepared and circulated a provisional text of conclusions for the major sections of the synthesis paper. The Task Force approved the general format of the provisional conclusions and provided comments.

IV. FURTHER STEPS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORKPLAN

11. The Chair presented a paper on a strategy for implementing the workplan, annexing an outline proposal for the proposed workshop. In view of the level and content of the response received to the written consultation phase, the Task Force agreed that the proposed workshop would constitute the central focus for the remainder of the consultation process.

12. The Task Force considered and agreed on the priorities on which to base the direct dialogue stage in the consultation process envisaged in the workplan. It agreed that the overriding consideration in inviting any forum to engage in further consultation should be the level of interest that the forum expressed through its responses during the consultation process and/or in connection with the workshop.

13. The Task Force discussed additional criteria for the selection of interested forums to be invited to engage in further consultation through direct dialogue, such as the forums' areas of focus, the interest of their practice, and their project orientation. It was also agreed to make special efforts to seek the involvement of a small number of identified Category 1 forums.

14. In connection with the choice of forums, the Task Force considered the possible directions of the direct dialogue phase. The Task Force discussed linkages between the direct dialogue phase and the organization of the workshop.

15. The Task Force then discussed further the various organizational aspects of the workshop regarding the venue, duration, structure, languages and workshop themes and agreed upon how these should be addressed (see annex).

16. The Task Force discussed the issue of the venue and found that Geneva was a suitable venue, given the organizational and budgetary dimensions of the event.

17. The Task Force discussed potential participants for the workshop from the pool of invited international forums, noting that possible participants might include representatives from secretariats, member Governments and academics and non-governmental organizations engaged in the international forums' processes. The Task Force agreed that invitations should be sent to all Category 1 and 2 forums except those that had indicated they did not wish to participate. With respect to Category 3 forums, the Task Force agreed that only forums that had expressed interest

in taking part in the consultation process or workshop, or that had interesting good practices, should be invited. In addition to these forums, it was suggested to invite the Intergovernmental Commission on Sustainable Development for Central Asia and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization. The Task Force agreed that, while some flexibility was needed, the emphasis should be on forums identified as priority by the Working Group of the Parties, especially with respect to the provision of financial support. Task Force members and interested Aarhus Parties' representatives would also be welcome to attend the workshop.

18. The Task Force recommended that the workshop take place as early as practicable in the first half of 2007.

19. Regarding the structure of the workshop, the Task Force discussed the plenary session and the discussion groups, as well as the issue of keynote speakers. It agreed that a maximum of four discussion groups should be planned for.

20. The Task Force discussed potential themes around which the discussion groups might be structured and the extent to which the three pillars of the Convention should be reflected in these themes. The Task Force agreed on the following four broad themes:

- (a) Techniques and processes for providing and disseminating information on the environment;
- (b) Identifying, contacting and involving stakeholders;
- (c) Public participation in projects and in supporting implementation, and in international forums engaged in developing and implementing projects;
- (d) Capacity-building, resources and infrastructure.

21. It was agreed that access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice were transversal themes that should be reflected in each discussion group. However, it was also agreed that access to information had special relevance to theme (a).

22. The Task Force envisaged that the workshop would produce a number of outcomes for consideration by the Task Force at its third meeting in autumn 2007, including a report of the workshop, a Chair's summary, and a paper to be drawn from the substance of the discussion, to be annexed to the Chair's summary.

23. The Chair invited the Task Force to report on internal consultations that had been undertaken in accordance with paragraph 12 of the workplan. Experts from France, Italy and the European Community gave reports on this point. The Task Force stressed the importance of such internal consultations and agreed to draw this matter, together with the importance of including matters relating to article 3, paragraph 7 in the reporting by Aarhus Parties to the Meeting of the Parties, to the attention of the Working Group of the Parties.

24. The secretariat was requested to circulate a more detailed outline of the workshop programme to the Task Force members by e-mail with a short period for comment.

25. The Task Force noted that, in accordance with the workplan, the consultation process would end in July 2007. It agreed that at its third meeting in autumn 2007 it would need to prepare its report on the consultation process for submission to the meeting of the Working

Group of the Parties in early 2008. The major outputs of its work would be the finalized synthesis paper of responses received from international forums to the written questionnaire, the outcomes from the workshop as discussed in paragraph 22 above, outcomes from the direct consultations conducted and other input received under paragraph 7 of decision II/4. It agreed to draft conclusions drawn from these outputs for the consideration of the Working Group of the Parties. It also agreed that its report to the Working Group of the Parties should address, *inter alia*, the ways in which the outcomes of the consultation process could be used by Parties to support and inform their efforts to implement article 3, paragraph 7, of the Convention and by the Working Group of the Parties in its task of reviewing the Guidelines and making recommendations, as appropriate, for consideration by the Parties at their next ordinary meeting.

V. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

26. European ECO-Forum made an intervention stating that, in its opinion, the draft decisions on rules of procedure and compliance mechanism currently being drafted under the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers did not take into account the Guidelines or the principles of the Aarhus Convention.

VI. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT AND CLOSE OF THE MEETING

27. After the Task Force's reading and adoption of the draft report, the Chair thanked the experts for their work during the meeting, and the secretariat and the consultant for their support of the work of the Task Force, and closed the meeting.

ANNEX: OUTLINE PROPOSAL FOR WORKSHOP

Title	Involving the Public in International Forums Dealing with Matters Relating to the Environment
Purpose	To provide a forum in which Aarhus Parties and stakeholders and representatives of other international forums (from Governments, secretariats and other stakeholders) can meet to exchange experiences of the forums' practices with respect to the themes of access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice. The Almaty Guidelines will be a key background document.
Date	April–June 2007
Duration	2 days
Venue	Geneva
Chair	Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention
Keynote speakers	Prominent experts in the area of public participation in international forums, with an emphasis on including speakers representing various perspectives (e.g. of IGOs, NGOs, academia)
	To be identified
Participants	Approximately 80–100 participants
	To include participants from 20–30 international forums, including representatives of secretariats, interested Member Governments, and academics and non-governmental organizations engaged in the international forum's processes; PPIF Task Force members; and representatives of interested Aarhus Parties
Format	A mixture of presentations and discussion groups
Languages	English, preferably also French and Russian
Documentation	Almaty Guidelines
	Synthesis of responses received from international forums to the written questionnaire in the consultation process on the Almaty Guidelines
	Other relevant documentation

Preliminary programme

1. High level-opening session:

Philosophical underpinnings for involving the public in international forums dealing with matters relating to the environment, including discussion of different conceptual approaches to what “involving the public in international forums” means and the challenges of the same
2. Presentation and discussion of the results of the consultation to date on public participation in international forums
3. Presentations of best practice by representatives of a few international forums, including the Aarhus Convention, and non-governmental organizations
4. Discussion groups on various themes identified in the written consultation process, with a particular focus on overcoming challenges
5. Closing session on promoting the involvement of the public in international forums, including reporting by discussion groups to the plenary

Outcomes

- Report of workshop
- Chair’s summary
- Annex to Chair’s summary: Paper to be drawn from the discussion groups on various themes

These documents are intended to form an important part of the direct consultation phase of the consultation process and will be considered by the PPIF Task Force at its third meeting in late 2007.