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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

Eleventh meeting  
Geneva, 8–10 July 2009  
Item 12 of the provisional agenda

**CAPACITY-BUILDING**

Report by the secretariat

*Summary*

At its twenty-first meeting (30 March 2009), the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention requested the secretariat to prepare a report on capacity-building for the eleventh meeting of the Working Group of the Parties, to assist the Working Group in meeting its mandate to oversee implementation of the work programme of the Convention during the intersessional period (see decision III/9 on the work programme for 2009–2011 (ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2008/2/Add.17, annex, activity II) and decision I/14 on the establishment of the Working Group of the Parties (ECE/MP.PP/2/Add.15, para. 1)).

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## INTRODUCTION

1. At the third session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention (Riga, 11–13 June 2008), in decision III/9 on the work programme for 2009–2011, the Parties decided to give general priority to issues related to compliance and implementation, including capacity-building (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.17, para. 3). Although no separate decision on capacity-building was taken<sup>1</sup>, the Meeting of the Parties welcomed the secretariat's report on capacity-building (ECE/MP.PP/2008/6) and took note of the additional points raised in the discussion of capacity-building.

2. The present note first examines the role of capacity-building in the strategic plan for the Convention for 2009–2014. It next reviews capacity-building coordination activities undertaken by the secretariat since the finalization of the note on capacity-building prepared for the third session of the Meeting of the Parties. National and regional capacity-building activities are then surveyed in the context of each of the three pillars. National and regional capacity-building activities to support implementation of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs) are addressed for the period beginning 2009.<sup>2</sup> The note concludes with some general observations on trends in capacity-building and the structure of reporting on capacity-building undertaken by the secretariat.

### I. CAPACITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES IN THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE CONVENTION FOR 2009–2014

3. In Riga, the Parties adopted decision III/8 on a strategic plan for the Convention for 2009–2014 (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.16), which further recognizes the central role of capacity-building to the implementation of the Convention and Protocol. The strategic plan gives primary importance to the strengthening of the Convention's implementation by the Parties, while also recognizing the importance of further developing the Convention and its expansion to more countries. The strategic plan further acknowledges that the experience of the Convention may provide an inspiration or model for initiatives being undertaken in fields other than environment.

4. With respect to the three pillars of the Convention, the strategic plan addresses strengthening capacities by undertaking capacity-building in the following areas:

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<sup>1</sup>The Meeting of the Parties has adopted several decisions and made a number of statements related to capacity-building, including decision I/10 on capacity-building and the clearing-house mechanism, decisions II/3 and III/2 on electronic information tools and the clearing-house mechanism, decisions II/2 and III/3 on promoting effective access to justice, the Lucca Declaration (October 2002), the Almaty Declaration (May 2005) and the Riga Declaration (June 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Capacity-building activities to support implementation of the Protocol on PRTRs in 2008 are covered in the report of the sixth meeting of the Working Group on PRTRs (Geneva, 22–24 November 2008; ECE/MP.PP/AC.1/2008/2, paras. 33–44).

- (a) Access to information:
  - (i) Regional and subregional capacity-building activities in support of establishment of pollutant release and transfer registers (objective I.8);
- (b) Public participation:
  - (i) Capacity-building for officials at all levels leading to the development of an open administrative culture which supports public participation and transparency in environmental matters (objective I.6);
  - (ii) Development of non-governmental organizations' capacity is supported and civil society is strengthened to enhance the effectiveness of public participation (objective III.5);
- (c) Access to justice:
  - (i) Work on promoting effective access to justice, in particular capacity-building and exchange of good practice, inter alia, on the issue of criteria for standing (objective III.6);
  - (ii) Information, training and capacity-building measures for legal professionals in accordance with decision II/2 (objective I.11).

5. In support of the Convention's general implementation, the strategic plan also addresses the provision of capacity-building and financial assistance, to provide for appropriate recognition of and support to civil society organizations promoting environmental protection (objective I.12).

## **II. COORDINATION FRAMEWORK FOR CAPACITY-BUILDING**

### **A. Capacity-building coordination meetings**

6. The secretariat convened the fifth meeting on capacity-building coordination on 27 November 2008 in Geneva. The meeting was attended by the following capacity-building partner organizations: Environmental Management and Law Association (EMLA, Hungary), on behalf of the Access Initiative and the public interest legal network, Justice and Environment; the European Commission; the European Environment Bureau (EEB), on behalf of European ECO-Forum; the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC); the Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia (CAREC); the Russian Regional Environmental Center, on behalf of a project supporting implementation of the Convention in Central Asia funded by the European Commission under its TACIS<sup>3</sup> project; the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).

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<sup>3</sup> Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States.

7. The attending capacity-building partner organizations reported on their respective activities and programmes. An overview of these activities is provided in chapter III of the present document. This exchange of information and sharing of experience was found to be useful and valuable by the participants.

8. The meeting concluded with a discussion of the strategic directions capacity-building should take. Some participants urged concentrating on the role of National Focal Points, as they were at the heart of the implementation process. In the provision of technical cooperation, more pilot projects were being undertaken at the local level. Demonstrating the value of such projects posed a challenge, hence there was a need to communicate information about them to the secretariat. One suggestion was that the secretariat establish a capacity-building activities matrix to capture the variety of activities being carried out in the region in order to improve tracking of such activities. In the view of several partners, the participatory platforms offered by the Aarhus Centres could be used to facilitate the capacity-building initiatives.

#### **B. International Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers Coordinating Group**

9. The fourth meeting of the International PRTR Coordinating Group was held in Paris on 10 March 2009. The meeting was attended by representatives of UNEP Global Environment Facility (GEF) Coordination Unit and UNEP Chemicals, UNITAR, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), REC and, representing the TACIS project, the Environmental Resources Management (ERM) consortium. The meeting was also attended by representatives of nine member States: Belgium, Canada, France, Japan, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) served as secretariat to the meeting.

10. The Coordinating Group agreed to prepare an information note for the second International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM2, Geneva, 11–15 May 2009) aiming to increase recognition of PRTRs at the Conference. The body of the note would describe and diagram strategic linkages, e.g. to the Stockholm Convention of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol. UNITAR would prepare a side-event on PRTR at ICCM2 on 11 May 2009. The secretariat had prepared an online database of PRTR capacity-building activities (matrix) that it had presented through the Aarhus Clearinghouse. The revised matrix showed linkages to other multilateral environmental and chemical agreements.

11. The Coordinating Group further agreed to establish a contact group to prepare a note on the relevance of PRTRs to the climate change agenda. The secretariat was asked to prepare and circulate a draft of the note to the contact group. It was proposed to organize a side-event to the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to UNFCCC in Copenhagen in December 2009. The European Commission and European Environment Agency (EEA) were invited to co-organize the side-event.

12. The secretariat had facilitated the transfer of the host of the global portal on PRTRs, PRTR.net, from Environment Canada to UNEP/GRID-Arendal. Management of PRTR.net will be transitioned from OECD to the UNECE secretariat during the 2009–2010 biennium.

### **III. CAPACITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMES UNDER THE CONVENTION AND PROTOCOL**

#### **A. Raising awareness**

13. An international conference on “Environmental Governance and Democracy”, organized by UNITAR and Yale University, in collaboration with the secretariat, was held at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, United States, in May 2008, in the margins of the sixteenth session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development. The objective of the conference was to develop a research programme and network to strengthen institutional approaches for effective and context-sensitive public participation in environmental governance.

14. An international conference, “The Aarhus Convention at Ten: Interactions and Tensions between Conventional International Law and EU Environmental Law”, was organized by University of Amsterdam in Amsterdam on 25 June 2008 to mark the tenth anniversary of the Convention’s adoption. This conference involved two former Chairpersons of the Meeting of the Parties, as well as international experts, including several drawn from various bodies of the Convention.

15. In November 2008, the University of Aarhus hosted a tenth anniversary conference celebrating the adoption of the Convention on the theme, “The Role of Information in the Age of Climate Change”. The conference was organized in close cooperation with the French Presidency of the European Union (EU) Council, the Danish Ministry of Environment, the Danish Ministry of Climate and Energy, EEA, UNECE, the Danish Society for Nature Conservation, Central Denmark Region and the Municipality of Aarhus. The National Environmental Research Institute and the University of Aarhus and its Climate Secretariat were responsible for the practical organization of the conference. The secretariat assisted in the preparations for the conference and a representative of the secretariat delivered a keynote speech. The Chairperson of the Meeting of the Parties, Mr. Jan Dusik (Czech Republic), also delivered a speech, which focused on the Convention’s tenth anniversary.

16. An international climate conference, “Beyond Kyoto: Addressing the Challenges of Climate Change”, involving more than 1,000 participants, including prominent representatives from science, industry, policy and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), was held at the University of Aarhus in March 2009. The secretariat participated and delivered a keynote speech at the event. The conference rapporteurs called on the Parties to UNFCCC to include in the anticipated Copenhagen agreement provisions on access to information, public participation and access to justice in relation to climate change, building on the broad consensus reflected in that

Convention's article 6 of and principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and also drawing on elements of the Aarhus Convention<sup>4</sup>.

17. The secretariat participated in the thirteenth International Anti-Corruption Conference, "Global Transparency: Fighting Corruption for a Sustainable Future", in October 2008 in Athens. The secretariat gave presentations on the Convention and the Protocol on PRTRs as instruments enhancing the transparency of environmental decision-making during the Conference's opening workshop, "Governing the Climate Change Agenda – Making the Case for Transparency". The Conference was organized by Transparency International.

18. The secretariat also promoted awareness of the Convention in presentations made at the Fourth Forum on the Future of Democracy organized by the Council of Europe (Madrid, October 2008) and at the Second International Conference on the Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance, organized by the United Nations University (Cairo, December 2008).

19. The Convention was discussed as a model for a code of good practice in Internet governance at a workshop jointly organized by the Association for Progressive Communications, the Council of Europe and the UNECE secretariat, at the Third Internet Governance Forum in December 2008 in Hyderabad, India.<sup>5</sup>

20. REC has been working to integrate provisions of the Convention in other fields where it is not a major focus at the moment, e.g. in the European Community Water Framework Directive and UNFCCC. REC is the focal point for Central and Eastern Europe for article 6 of UNFCCC, which deals, inter alia, with access to information and public participation in climate change-related decision-making. REC also serves on the steering committee of a new EU-supported project to explore public participation in the nuclear power sector. A workshop will be organized on the topic in June 2009.

21. CAREC has included information about the Convention's provisions in a handbook for environmental NGOs in the context of the European Community-supported project "Local Training for NGOs in Central Asia", and provided a two-day training event on the Convention in the framework of the "Training for Young Environmental Leaders" programme.

22. On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Organization at Geneva published a commemorative edition of *United Nations Special*, to which the secretariat contributed the article, "Climate Justice". The article examined the application of the principles of the Convention and Protocol to the global climate change agenda.

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<sup>4</sup> Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.

<sup>5</sup> UNECE was represented at the event by the Office of the Executive Secretary rather than by the Convention secretariat.

## **B. Facilitating general implementation**

23. Draft guidelines for the development of national legislation on access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters were presented to the UNEP Governing Council at its twenty-fifth session in February 2009 in Nairobi. In its decision 25/11, the Governing Council noted, *inter alia*, the tenth anniversary of the Convention's adoption and took note of the draft guidelines. It requested UNEP to carry out further work on the guidelines with a view to their being adopted by the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at its next special session in 2010. The guidelines could be a valuable instrument to stimulate capacity-building in the areas covered by the Convention.

24. European ECO-Forum has examined the procedure of national consultations in the preparation of national implementation reports and prepared an English version for publication. A Russian-language translation of the publication is also in preparation. NGOs from 24 countries have engaged in a capacity-building activity on national implementation reporting sponsored by European ECO-Forum.

25. Subregional workshops for NGOs in Kazakhstan and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were held in early 2008 under the auspices of European ECO-Forum, resulting in closer cooperation in their work on the Convention and enhanced preparations for the third session of the Meeting of the Parties. The European ECO-Forum had also organized two side-events at the session, on compliance and public participation in international forums, which were widely attended.

26. The Access Initiative (TAI), a global coalition of 70 organizations, undertook an assessment of implementation of principle 10 of the Rio Declaration in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, based on TAI methodology, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Environment. The World Bank has funded the activities of TAI in many countries, including the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Ukraine.

27. Justice and Environment, an NGO network, held a side-event entitled "Access to Justice – The Naked Truth" at the third session of the Meeting of Parties to the Convention (Riga, 13 June 2008), which attracted over 30 participants.

28. Aarhus Centres are very important tools for promoting environmental governance in countries where environmental issues and potential conflicts have a security dimension. Under an OSCE-led initiative, Aarhus Centres had been established in seven countries since 2002. OSCE commissioned an independent evaluation of Aarhus Centres that was concluded in September 2008. The evaluation was a combination of, document analysis and consultations with key stakeholders (including the Convention secretariat, OSCE secretariat staff, OSCE field operations staff, National Focal Points for the Convention, managers of Aarhus Centres, government representatives, NGOs and academia). A regional meeting of representatives of the Aarhus Centres and OSCE field officers was held in January 2009 in Vienna. The Convention secretariat participated in the meeting and pledged to assist with capacity-building for the Centres. Taking the Convention's strategic plan as a reference, OSCE had prepared a road map and guidelines for the future development of the Aarhus Centres initiative, in consultation with the UNECE secretariat.

29. A new Aarhus Centre for the Caspian Sea subregion was being set up in Kazakhstan. A workshop on the scope and functions of the Caspian Sea Centre was held in Atyrau, Kazakhstan, in April 2009, through the support of the Kazakh Ministry of Environment and OSCE.

30. The Aarhus Centres in the three countries of the South Caucasus were involved in a project to strengthen their regional network, with the support of the Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative. Similarly, a regional project was launched by OSCE for the Central Asia subregion to support the Convention's implementation in the subregion through existing and new Aarhus Centres as well as to promote regional cooperation in this respect. In 2009, UNECE became Chair of ENVSEC and announced its intention to mainstream climate change activities into the Initiative, including in the work of the Aarhus Centres.

31. The TACIS project was initiated in September 2007 with the aim of promoting transboundary cooperation among the Central Asian States by strengthening public participation and civil society and by supporting the implementation of the Convention in the subregion. The five project components include: (a) raising awareness in the judiciary; (b) legislative support; (c) regional and national capacity development; (d) design and implementation of pilot projects; and (e) support for implementation of the Protocol on PRTRs. Four national coordination committees for the project, as well as a regional coordination committee, were established in 2008. Uzbekistan was invited to participate, but declined to do so. The project has conducted a legal gap analysis in each country.

32. The Access Initiative held a global meeting in Sligo, Ireland, in October-November 2008. The event brought together NGO representatives from 38 countries. The Gates Foundation, the World Bank, World Resources Institute and the Convention secretariat were also represented.

33. CAREC has issued guidelines on implementation of the Convention in Kazakhstan and provided related training for NGOs from different regions in Kazakhstan. The guidelines have been published in Russian on the CAREC website and distributed in hard copy to NGOs and State authorities in different regions of Kazakhstan. Similar national guides were developed for Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, where hard copies and training modules were planned to be distributed in May 2009. These publications were supported by the European Community-supported project, "NGO Capacity-building in the Field of Access to Justice".

### **C. Access to information**

34. At its third session, the Meeting of the Parties agreed, through decision III/2, to extend the mandate of the Task Force on Electronic Information Tools, including through the wider application of electronic tools to promote public participation in support of Convention's implementation. The Meeting requested the secretariat to support the implementation of capacity-building measures, including:

- (a) Implementation of pilot projects, or supporting the implementation of such projects, e.g. through coordinating fund-raising;
- (b) Developing e-learning courses on the Convention;

(c) Providing technical assistance to national nodes of the clearing-house mechanism, including on the application of guidance materials and through a programme of training workshops in support of capacity-building on electronic information tools and the clearing-house mechanism.

35. The Malta Environment and Planning Authority and the Austrian Environment Agency had compiled guidelines on the rights and obligations related to the Convention. These guidelines offered practical and tailored advice for the public to ensure that public authorities were accountable for environmental decisions. The guidelines discussed what environmental information could be requested by the public and how it was to be made available by public authorities. The guidelines were prepared under an EU twinning project between the two countries on implementation of the Convention in Malta.

36. Environmental Management and Law Association had completed a national study on access to environmental information, undertaken as part of a larger analysis of access to information in Hungary in 2008.

37. The Aarhus Centres were actively providing information to the public on environmental legislation and projects at the national level. Other awareness-raising activities undertaken by the Centres included the organization of workshops on environmental topics, publication of monthly newsletters and placement of information boards or kiosks in public places. Some Centres had developed telephone hotlines, enabling citizens to report breaches of environmental law. The training of environmental journalists had also been undertaken in several countries, e.g. Armenia and Georgia. Furthermore, the Aarhus Centre in Georgia was recognized as the Best National Node for the Aarhus Clearinghouse in 2008.

38. REC received a grant from UNECE in 2008 to prepare an online compendium of good practices in electronic access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters. REC reported on its research in a side-event to the third session of the Meeting of the Parties, and the secretariat drew from the preliminary results in an invited session at the Second International Conference on the Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance (Cairo, December 2008). The compendium would be published both online and as an official United Nations publication in 2009.

39. The secretariat had participated in an expert meeting on the right of access to information (Budapest, 12–14 December 2008). The meeting was held to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and welcomed the increasing recognition of access to information as a fundamental human right. It had taken place in the wake of the adoption of a new Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents on 27 November 2008. The meeting resulted in the adoption of the Budapest Declaration on the Right of Access to Information.

#### **D. Public participation**

40. At its third session, the Meeting of the Parties agreed to address the implementation of the public participation pillar of the Convention by establishing an intersessional body under the authority of the Working Group, recognizing the need for further work in this area

(ECE/MP.PP/2008/2, para. 72). Through decision III/9, the Meeting agreed to convene an ad hoc expert group to coordinate information sharing on public participation, including through the collection of good practice examples in this area (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.17, para. 5). Through decision III/2, the Meeting of the Parties further agreed to promote public participation in support of implementation of the Convention through furthering the application of electronic tools (ECE/MP.PP/2008/2/Add.4). Further capacity-building activities in support of the public participation pillar of the Convention may be expected as the outcome of these mandates.

41. In 2009, EMLA plans to conduct a study on environmental participation and the access of marginalized groups in environmental decision-making in Hungary, through the support of grants from EEA.

42. European ECO-Forum has prepared a publication comparing the amendment to the Convention adopted in 2005 on the topic of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity, as part of a campaign to work with Governments to promote ratification of the GMO amendment.

43. OSCE continued its support for the public participation pillar of the Convention through Aarhus Centres in several countries. Aarhus Centre Georgia is tracking and publishing tri-monthly reports on environmental impact assessments in Georgia. Aarhus Centres in Albania, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have undertaken several public participation initiatives, mostly in the form of public hearings for new environmental legislation, policies and plans.

44. A European workshop on the practical implementation of the Convention in the nuclear field is scheduled to be held on 24 and 25 June 2009 in Luxembourg. The workshop aims to provide an overview of the topic, particularly in terms of legal implementation and governance, and to observe and analyse, through concrete cases and practices, key questions on participation, transparency and the transboundary dimension in this policy area. The secretariat has been invited to participate in the event. The workshop will be followed by a series of national and European round tables, culminating in a regional conference aiming to develop a European vision and actions to improve transparency in the nuclear field at the European level.

#### **E. Access to justice**

45. At its third session, the Meeting of the Parties also agreed to extend in time the mandate of the Task Force on Access to Justice. The Task Force was requested, inter alia, to focus on the collection and dissemination of information about relevant practices and jurisprudence as well as to continue implementation of strategic capacity-building activities.

46. Under the auspices of the TACIS project and in partnership with OSCE, an event promoting awareness of the Convention was held in Astana in June 2008 for senior judges. The judges came mainly from Kazakhstan, with some from neighbouring Central Asian countries. A draft guide was prepared by OSCE and was presented to the judges at the event. The TACIS project also included training on access to justice for senior judges at the national level.

47. EEB organized a visit by high-level judges from Kazakhstan to Brussels in 2008 to raise awareness of access to justice issues.

48. A workshop on access to justice was held on 17 and 18 November 2008 in Tirana for senior members of the judiciary from South-Eastern Europe (see ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2009/5). The workshop was organized by UNECE in cooperation with OSCE. Judges and representatives of the Judicial Training Centres from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo, participated. The workshop closely followed the successful model of a previous workshop on access to justice in environmental matters (Kyiv, 4–5 June 2007), which had also had the aim of raising awareness on access to justice issues among the judiciary.

49. Following a conference under French Presidency of the EU on the role of judges in the implementation of European Community environmental law (9–10 October 2008), the European Commission launched a cooperation programme with national judges from EU countries in the field of environmental law. This programme is piloted by a Steering Committee that includes professional associations representing judges. A plenary meeting gathering representatives from Member States Judges' Training Centres took place on 27 March 2009 and established priorities for development of training modules in 2009 and 2010. The programme will develop training material tested in seminars with national judges. Four seminars are planned to take place in EU Member States in 2009. Training materials covering the three pillars of the Convention, e.g. documents or case-studies, as well as the methodology for applying the material, would be made available.

50. The French National Academy of Magistrates and the Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development conducted a two-day seminar on access to justice for members of the judiciary and other legal professionals (Paris, 26–27 March 2009). The secretariat participated in the event.

51. A workshop for EU countries on access to justice and the Convention (Brno, Czech Republic, 16–17 April 2009) was organized by the Czech Ministry of Environment in cooperation with the NGO Justice and Environment .

52. EMLA participated in an annual meeting with Hungarian Supreme Court justices and legal aid NGOs and was engaged in the training of judges on environmental issues in Latvia and South-Eastern Europe.

53. Justice and Environment plans to undertake a multi-country study of the cost of judicial access for NGOs with the support of the Netherlands Ministry of Environment.

#### **F. Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers**

54. European ECO-Forum has prepared a computer programme in Russian on PRTRs that enables NGOs to input information on pollutants and enterprises. It is preparing a manual on how to use the application and is also preparing materials for a training course on PRTRs for universities.

55. Under the TACIS project, pilot projects to implement PRTRs are under way in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. A regional conference on PRTRs is scheduled to take place in May 2009 in which experts from EECCA are expected to participate. The conference is being supported by the European Commission, OSCE and UNECE.

56. The GEF-funded global POPs PRTR project was launched in January 2009. This \$3.5 million, 13-country project aims, inter alia, to design national PRTR systems in six countries, including Kazakhstan and Ukraine. National inception workshops are being organized in early 2009. The secretariat has accepted an invitation to participate in the project steering committee.

57. REC is preparing a PRTR interactive training module, which it expects to launch by mid-2009.

#### IV. GENERAL TRENDS AND CONSIDERATIONS

58. The above snapshot of capacity-building activities provides a basis for the ongoing review of trends in capacity-building for the Convention and Protocol on PRTRs since the submission of the report on capacity-building to the third session of the Meeting of the Parties in 2008. Each major subregion has initiatives in place to further the implementation of the Convention. The secretariat has renewed its efforts to coordinate and maximize the impact of capacity-building initiatives through its ongoing coordination of capacity-building.

59. Most capacity-building efforts related to the Convention's implementation continue to focus on countries with economies in transition and to some extent on the new EU Member States. This focus is largely based on the needs expressed by the beneficiary countries themselves.

60. In the field of access to justice, significant efforts are being made to provide training sessions or awareness-raising events for senior judges and other legal professionals in all subregions, including the EU. The information shared at the coordination meeting indicated that remedies and assistance mechanisms to reduce or remove barriers to access to justice are key priority areas.

61. Capacity-building in the implementation of national PRTRs has expanded significantly since the third session of the Meeting of the Parties, with new projects under way in the South Caucasus, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, and Central Asia, as well as outside the UNECE region. Additional resources have been contributed by the GEF and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM). Support for PRTR capacity-building remains a high priority for countries with economies in transition.

62. Significant awareness-raising with respect to both the Convention and the Protocol was accomplished in 2008 in the context of efforts to address the issue of climate change. This may have contributed to calls for the inclusion of provisions in the anticipated Copenhagen agreement reflecting the provisions of the Convention.

63. Regionally, there is an increasing demand from capacity-building partner organizations for facilitation of capacity-building, in particular in sector-specific areas such as climate change, environmental impact assessment and nuclear power. Past awareness-raising efforts have resulted in consideration of the application of the principles of the Convention in new thematic areas, such as Internet governance.

64. Ongoing training of NGOs in the operation of the Convention's compliance review mechanism has been undertaken by European ECO-Forum. European ECO-Forum has encouraged NGOs and the civil society community in general to consolidate their communications wherever possible, to avoid duplication and the inefficient use of resources. Although such training may lead to an increase in the rate of communications from the public in the short term, it is hoped that they will serve to raise the most significant issues regarding compliance by the Parties and in the long term lead to a more effective implementation of the Convention, as well as a more efficient use of the compliance review process.

65. Exchanges of experience at both the coordination meeting and the regional meeting for Aarhus Centre representatives showed that in the majority of countries hosting Aarhus Centres, the Centres were one of the few platforms – and in some cases the only platform – for bringing NGOs and Governments together to enter into dialogue. The need for increased government ownership of and involvement with the Aarhus Centres, as well as greater involvement by the business community, was recognized by the representatives attending. The Centres' capacity to deliver services supporting the Convention's implementation is uneven, however. The secretariat proposed that it facilitate provision of capacity-building to the Centres on core Convention functions, as appropriate and within available resources, possibly through organizing an annual training event for the staff of Aarhus Centres. The question of establishing Aarhus Centres in certain Western countries that do not already have equivalent institutions could be further explored.

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