

Opening address of the High level segment by Mr. Jan Dusík, Chair of the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (21 April 2010, 15:00)

Ladies and gentlemen, Excellencies,

I am honoured to have been given the opportunity to deliver the opening address to this high level meeting to the first meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTR which is a great achievement in the history of the Aarhus Convention and the Protocol itself. The Czech Republic stood at its very beginnings. Mr. Karel Bláha, Deputy Minister of the Environment of the Czech Republic, who is with us today, chaired the negotiating process of the Protocol and later became the chair of the Working Group on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers. He was followed by the newly elected Chair of the Bureau of the Meeting of Parties to the Protocol on PRTR, Mr. Michel Amand whom I would like to congratulate on his very important new role.

As the Chair of the Bureau of the Aarhus Convention, I am glad that I can be present here on this important occasion and emphasize the importance of the Protocol as a tool for strengthening the implementation of the first pillar of the Aarhus Convention. It is vital that the public has an easy access to information which facilitates its participation in matters relating to the environment, thus strengthening also the second pillar of the Convention.

A register is very effective in identifying areas of policy needs and thus helps in setting environmental policy protecting humans and the environment from potential risks. This should be done in a cost-effective manner and all affected and interested parties should have the opportunity to participate in the selection of policy options.

The value of the Protocol lays in its multi-stakeholder approach which makes it a useful and effective tool in achieving goals in various areas of international environmental governance. Chemical management and climate change are the main areas of the Protocol's outreach and will benefit from its capacity to provide periodic and reliable data on releases and transfers of pollutants. All substances identified in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol are included in the Protocol's annex II list of threshold pollutants. The data collected on greenhouse gases emissions by facility can be used to strengthen inventorying of greenhouse gases emissions and therefore significantly contribute to fighting the climate change. This all makes the Protocol on PRTR a unique instrument that contributes to the prevention and reduction of pollution of the environment.

Since the adoption of the Protocol in 2003 in Kiev it has been ratified by 25 Parties. I strongly believe that the Protocol's entry into force on 8 October 2009 will encourage other countries in their endeavours to become Party to the Protocol and thus help us achieve the targets set in the Global Plan of Action of the Strategic Approach to the International Chemicals Management that called for development of national PRTRs in all countries by 2015. We must strive for the broadest possible implementation of the Protocol's main provisions in as many countries as possible, including countries outside the UN ECE region. In the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia countries the process towards ratification or accession sometimes lacks either political will or technical capacity to develop a PRTR system. To facilitate such process, the ECE Guidance of Implementation of the Protocol on PRTR published in 2008 should be as soon as possible translated in national languages. Of course, sufficient funding is necessary to be able to further support PRTR development, especially in countries with economies in transition and developing countries. When looking for both

national as well as international sources we have to have in our minds that resources devoted to the establishment of the register will very soon pay back bringing multiple benefits for governments, the private sector and the public.

I hope that through the capacity-building and other supportive mechanisms adopted at this meeting, the UN ECE will become the global leader in PRTR development and a strong supporter of chemical right-to-know. I am looking forward to the conclusions of this high level meeting's session and wish you all the best in your further work.