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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

Thirteenth meeting

Geneva, 9–11 February 2011

Item 3 (c) of the provisional agenda

**Substantive issues: electronic information tools
and the clearinghouse mechanism**

Draft decision on access to information

Prepared by the Bureau with the assistance of the secretariat

Summary

This document contains a proposed draft decision on access to information prepared by the Bureau of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) with the assistance of the Convention secretariat, in order to facilitate discussion on this topic by the Working Group of the Parties at its thirteenth session.

The Working Group may wish to consider the present document with a view to submitting it to the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention (Chisinau, 15–17 June 2011) for possible adoption. The draft decision contained herein takes into consideration that activities presently under way should be completed by the time the text is presented to the Meeting of the Parties.

The document is submitted to the Working Group in view of its mandate to “make such proposals and recommendations to the Meeting of the Parties as it considers necessary for the achievement of the purposes of the Convention” (ECE/MP.PP/2/Add.15, para. 2 (d)), and further to a decision by the Bureau of the Meeting of the Parties, taken at its twenty-sixth meeting (9 November 2010), on the need to enhance Parties’ implementation of their obligations under the Convention in this area.

The Meeting of the Parties,

Recalling the provisions of articles 4 and 5 of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters,

Recalling also its decisions I/6, II/3 and III/2 on electronic information tools and the clearinghouse mechanism, as well as objectives I.7 and III.2 of the Strategic Plan 2009–2014 as adopted through decision III/8,

1. *Recognizes* the need to continue strengthening implementation of the first pillar of the Convention so as to provide effective public access to environmental information and actively disseminate it to the public;

2. *Notes with appreciation* the work undertaken by the Task Force on Electronic Information Tools established pursuant to decisions I/6, II/3 and III/2;

3. *Expresses its gratitude* to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for its leadership of the Task Force since the second session of the Meeting of the Parties;

4. *Welcomes* initiatives by Parties, Signatories and other stakeholders to improve public accessibility of environmental information and to promote more effective implementation of articles 4 and 5 of the Convention;

5. *Invites* Parties, Signatories and other stakeholders in a position to do so to continue strengthening implementation of the information pillar of the Convention at the national level and to make resources available for this purpose;

6. *Also welcomes* the further development of the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy and the application of the recommendations in decision II/3 to promote the wider use of electronic information tools as an effective instrument for the implementation of the Convention's provisions, and *calls on* Parties and Signatories to continue implementing these recommendations;

7. *Agrees* to extend the scope of the work undertaken thus far in order to address areas of the Strategic Plan that were not previously covered by the mandate of the Task Force on Electronic Information Tools;

8. *Decides* therefore to change the name of the Task Force on Electronic Information Tools to the Task Force on Access to Information, under the authority of the Working Group of the Parties;

9. *Welcomes* the offer of [...] to lead the Task Force on Access to Information;

10. *Invites* Parties, Signatories, other interested States, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, research institutes and other stakeholders to participate in the work of the Task Force on Access to Information;

11. *Requests* the Task Force on Access to Information, subject to the availability of resources, to:

(a) Promote the exchange of information, experiences, challenges and good practices concerning public access to environmental information, inter alia, on the issues identified in objective III.2 of the Strategic Plan 2009–2014, such as the development of mechanisms to enable more informed consumer choices with regard to products and the promotion of accessibility of environmental information held by the private sector;

(b) Identify capacity-building needs, barriers and solutions with respect to public access to environmental information, including with regard to product information and the accessibility of environmental information held by the private sector, taking into account

issues identified through the reporting and compliance mechanisms and the relevant objectives of the Strategic Plan 2009–2014;

(c) Identify regional and subregional priorities for further work based on the results achieved under the auspices of the previous Task Force, and the work undertaken in the areas outlined in subparagraphs (a) and (b) above;

(d) Continue to monitor and support the implementation of the recommendations in decision II/3 and to promote approaches to and standards for providing public access to environmental information that are tailored to meet requirements of users from diverse geographical areas and at different levels of governance;

(e) Continue monitoring technical developments, and, where appropriate, contribute to other initiatives relevant to access to environmental information, including electronic information access, electronic public participation in decision-making, and electronic access to justice in environmental matters;

(f) Continue contributing to further development of the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy and PRTR.net;

12. *Entrusts* the secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, to participate in, plan and implement, as appropriate, capacity-building activities, including workshops and trainings; to support the maintenance and further development of the clearinghouse mechanism; and to promote electronic information tools at the regional level through maintaining online databases (e.g., for jurisprudence, national implementation reports and case studies on public participation at the national level and in international forums) and through an interactive online version of the updated Implementation Guide.
