

**THIRTY-FIRST MEETING OF THE BUREAU OF THE MEETING
OF THE PARTIES TO THE
CONVENTION ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PUBLIC
PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING AND ACCESS TO
JUSTICE IN ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS (AARHUS CONVENTION)**

Held back to back (after) the 16th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention

Friday, 21 June 2013
Salle V, Palais des Nations, Geneva

REPORT OF THE MEETING¹

ATTENDANCE:

Bureau members: Mr. Jit Peters (Netherlands, Chair), Ms. Loredana Dall’Ora (Italy, Vice-Chair), Mr. Ivan Narkevitch (Belarus, Vice-Chair), Mr. Thomas Legoupil (France), Ms. Gordana Petkovic (Serbia), Mr. Jean-François Brakeland (European Union).

Observers: Mr. Jeremy Wates (NGO observer, European Environmental Bureau representing European ECO Forum), Mr. Edwin Koning (Netherlands, Assistant to the Chair), Mr. Michel Amand (Belgium, Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutants Release and Transfers Registers).

Apologies: Mr. Lukas Pokorny (Czech Republic).

1. OPENING AND ADOPTION OF AGENDA

1. Chair opened the meeting and outlined its main objective is to follow up on decisions and outcomes as adopted by the Working Group at its sixteenth meeting (Geneva, 19-21 June), (AC/WGP-16/Inf. 11), in particular to discuss preparation of the draft decisions and draft Declaration for the seventeenth meeting of the Working Group.

2. The Bureau took note of the information provided by the Chair and the secretariat. The Bureau adopted provisional agenda of the meeting.

2. DISCUSSION ON THE DECLARATION

3. General remarks: Declaration should be short (up to 2 pages) and reflect the discussions at the High-level segment (HLS); thus the topics of the declaration should be in-line with the themes of the HLS.

4. Topics: Topics can be streamlined in 3 categories with the following key messages:

- ***Aarhus Convention and PRTR Protocol: access to information on environmental matters is an investment in good governance***
 - Access to environmental information, as a key precondition of good governance
 - Good governance should be promoted as an investment in times of crisis
 - Economic crisis does not justify reducing access to environmental information

¹ This document was not formally edited.

- Topic is partly a reaction to recent global developments as whistleblowers reveal how several governments are increasingly collecting the information about their citizens. In that sense leaking of information on environmental matters is ever more considered as a crime and readiness of governments to share information openly is diminishing. While at the same time enabling access to information on environmental matters is the core pillars of the Convention and its Protocol.

- ***Aarhus Convention and PRTR Protocol: framing the post-2015 development agenda/SDGs***

- It will be timely to address at the MOPs in 2014 how principles of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol could be included to the discussion on the post-2015 agenda and setting the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and how these principles can help governments and stakeholders to design post-2015 agenda in an inclusive and transparent manner.

- ***Promotion of the Convention and its Protocol, and their principles to other regions and forums***

- Developments in other regions, including progress in P10 initiative in Latin America.
- Global developments.
- Possible accessions by non-ECE States.
- Promoting principles of the Aarhus Convention to other forums (e.g. MOPs in 2014 will be organized just after the United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi; this momentum could be leveraged to discuss relevant meeting outcomes, especially in light of ensuring effective public participation).

5. Possible challenges: risk that envisaged high-level speakers might not confirm their participation or cancel in the last minute (in particular from non-ECE countries). As several governments of Parties are also expected to change in next year, only few high-level speakers from Parties can be confirmed in advance.

3. PREPARATION OF THE DRAFT DECISIONS AND DRAFT DECLARATION FOR THE 17TH MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP

6. The Bureau agreed on the following timeline for preparation of decisions and declaration:

(a) Decisions

- Secretariat revises draft decisions in light of the comments of the Working Group and sends them to the Bureau for email consultation to be completed by the end of September 2013.
- Draft decisions are distributed to Parties and stakeholders for comments with the deadline to respond by the end of October 2013.
- Secretariat revises draft decisions in light of the comments received and sends them to the Bureau for email consultation to be completed by the end of November 2013.
- Convention Bureau would finalise the draft decisions and revise Declaration for their submission to the 17th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 5-7 March 2014) at its 32nd meeting (Geneva, 2-3 December 2013).

(b) Declaration

- Chairs of the Convention and PRTR MOPs prepare the first draft Declaration and, with the assistance of the secretariat, send it to the two Bureaux for email consultation to be completed by mid-October 2013.
- The draft Declaration, revised by the two Chairs, is distributed to the Convention and Protocol on PRTRs Parties and stakeholders for comments with the deadline to respond by mid-November, and submitted to the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs for its consideration (Geneva, 20-21 November 2013).
- Bureau of the Protocol on PRTRs will meet back to back with the Protocol on PRTRs' Working Group of the Parties in November 2013 to revise the draft Declaration and to send it to the Convention's Bureau for its consideration.
- Convention Bureau would finalise the draft decisions and revise the Declaration for their submission to the 17th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 5-7 March 2014) at its 32nd meeting (Geneva, 2-3 December 2013).
- Chairs of the MOPs of the Convention and Protocol on PRTR will liaise, with the assistance of the secretariat, on the finalization of the draft Declaration for its submission to the two MOPs.

7. The Bureau took note of the information provided by the secretariat on a different timeline for preparing decisions related to compliance matters, which is dependent on the finalization of recommendations by the Compliance Committee.

4. ANY OTHER RELEVANT MATTERS DERIVED FROM THE DISCUSSIONS DURING THE MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP OF THE PARTIES

8. Mr. Jeremy Wates raised the issue of the progress made in relation to decision IV/5 (ECE/MP.PP/2011/2/Add.1) on the accession of non-UNECE countries to the Aarhus Convention. He expressed his concern with the lack of progress achieved and accounted the lack of progress to current procedural arrangements, where a non-UNECE country accession is contingent upon approval by the Meeting of the Parties. The Bureau considered that it is too early to have an assessment of these procedures, as it appears that a non-UNECE country that potentially wish to ratify the Convention experiences problems with its national procedures, not the procedures established through decision IV/5.

5. OTHER BUSINESS

9. The Bureau tentatively agreed to hold its next meeting in Geneva on 2-3 December 2013.

10. The Bureau took note of the report by Ms. Loredana Dall'Ora on the workshop on Transboundary Water Cooperation - Latin American and Pan-European Regions: Sharing Experiences and Learning from Each Other (Buenos Aires, 11-12 June 2013).

11. The Chair, Ms. Loredana Dall'Ora and Mr. Michel Amand also informed the Bureau on the outcomes of the third meeting between the representatives of the governing bodies of the ECE Environmental Conventions and the Committee on

Environmental Policy (Geneva, 27 February 2013)². Next informal meeting will be organized on 21 October 2013.

6. CLOSING.

12. The Chair thanked the Bureau for constructive work and the secretariat for its support and closed the meeting.

² See: <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/treaties/enenvironment-conventions/all/joint-work.html>