

REPORT OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE AARHUS CONVENTION EXPERT GROUP ON LONG-TERM STRATEGIC PLANNING

Oslo, 9-10 October 2006

1. The first meeting of the Expert Group on Long-Term Strategic Planning took place in Oslo, 9-10 October 2006. All members of the Expert Group were present except for Ms Magda Tóth Nagy who had had to cancel at short notice for family reasons and sent her apologies. The meeting was serviced by the UNECE secretariat.
2. Ms Hanne Inger Bjurstrøm (Norway), the Chairperson of the Meeting of the Parties, opened the meeting, welcoming the participants to Oslo and reminding them of the mandate of the Group and its expected output. She then handed over to Mr Marc Pallemarts (Belgium), who had been appointed by the Bureau to serve as Chairperson of the Expert Group.
3. The Chairperson of the Expert Group presented a discussion paper that he had prepared in order to structure the discussion (see annex).
4. The Expert Group then proceeded to discuss the process of preparing draft elements for a long-term strategic plan for the Convention. It addressed:
 - the structure and format of the plan
 - the vision and mission
 - possible focal areas, and goals/objectives within those areas
 - the procedure for developing the elements for the plan, noting the requirement under Decision II/8 that there be 'appropriate involvement of the public'.It also briefly discussed indicative types of activity, the framework for implementation of the plan and the range of implementing partners, mandating the Chair with the support of the secretariat to further develop proposals with respect to the last topic.
5. The Expert Group agreed upon the following procedure for the continuation of its work:

Nov - Dec 2006:	Chairperson to prepare first internal draft based on the discussions at the meeting
24 Dec 2006:	First internal draft circulated to Expert Group for comments
15 Jan 2007:	Deadline for Expert Group members to provide comments
1 Feb 2007:	Second internal draft to Expert Group members for checking
Feb 2006:	Resolution of any outstanding issues
1 March 2007:	First public draft posted on website specifying commenting period, notification sent to implementing partners
2-4 May 2007:	Bureau provides progress report to seventh meeting of Working Group of the Parties
14-15 May 2007:	Second meeting of Expert Group (subject to availability of funding and agreement of Bureau)
Early June 2007:	Proposed elements for strategic plan submitted to Bureau
6. The Chairperson closed the meeting, thanking Norway for its financial support as well as for the excellent facilities and kind hospitality.

Annex

A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE AARHUS CONVENTION

Discussion paper prepared by the Chairman for the first meeting of the ad hoc expert group on long-term strategic planning, Oslo, 9-10 October 2006

Mandate

The mandate for the group's work is set out in Decision II/8 of the MOP, which calls for the development of

“a strategic plan for the Convention covering a 5-year period starting the year following the third meeting of the Parties and containing the following main elements:

- (a) Vision or mission;
- (b) Focal areas and their specific goals and objectives;
- (c) Indicative types of activity;
- (d) Implementing partners;
- (e) Framework for implementation of the strategic plan”

The Almaty Declaration specifies that the long-term strategic plan should “translate our collective aspirations and priorities into operational terms.”

As regards the process, Decision II/8 mandates “appropriate involvement of the public”, and invites Parties and Signatories and other States as well as “relevant intergovernmental, regional and non-governmental organizations to contribute actively to the development of the strategic plan.” The draft strategic plan is to be submitted for adoption to MOP3 through the WGP. We are expected to report to WGP7 in April 2007.

Purpose of the paper and meeting

This paper is merely intended to facilitate and stimulate an open and wide-ranging discussion within the expert group. At the end of the meeting, I hope to achieve consensus on:

- the structure and format of the draft plan, based on the main elements agreed by the MOP
- a basic outline of the points to be covered under each of these elements, as well as any additional elements that the group considers should be included in the plan
- a procedure for drafting and further discussion within the group, using electronic means of communication
- a procedure for involving the public as appropriate and for obtaining contributions from intergovernmental, regional and non-governmental organizations, assuming that Parties and Signatories (and other interested States) will contribute through their participation in the WGP and MOP

The paper further lists a number of questions for discussion under each of the main elements identified by the MOP.

(a) Vision or mission

Do we need text on vision and mission or on one of those elements only?

The Almaty Declaration contains the following text that may be relevant:

“The Convention is an unprecedented instrument of international environmental law, representing a significant step forward both for the environment and for the consolidation of democracy. Today, gathered in Almaty, we reiterate our pledge to continue to advance both environmental protection and democratic governance by adhering to, implementing and possibly, where appropriate, further developing the Aarhus Convention as an instrument to enable public authorities and citizens to assume their individual and collective responsibility to protect and improve the environment for the welfare and well-being of present and future generations.”

“Our long-term strategic vision is to secure the enjoyment of the rights of environmental democracy in order to improve the state of the environment and promote sustainable development throughout the pan-European region and beyond. We see it as our mission to strengthen the rights of the public to have access to information, participate in decision-making and obtain access to justice in environmental matters, throughout the UNECE region, by promoting more effective implementation of the Convention by a larger number of Parties, by encouraging States which are not yet in a position to become Parties to take steps to participate in the Aarhus process and give effect to the principles of the Convention, and by further developing the Convention to the extent necessary, where doing so may usefully contribute to the achievement of its objective.”

“While we recognize that further work remains to be done on specific topics regarding the application of the principles of the Convention, we reiterate that promoting the implementation of and compliance with the Aarhus Convention and the Kiev Protocol is our immediate priority.”

Should the text on vision and/or mission be drafted on the basis of this agreed language?

If so, how can it be further refined, bearing into account the need for any such statement to be succinct and focused in order to be meaningful?

(b) Focal areas and their specific goals and objectives

What should be the focal areas? Should they be similar to those of the work programme or structured differently?

Should they be formulated in substantive (e.g. reflecting the 3 pillars) or functional terms?

How specific should the goals and objectives be? How can they be formulated in sufficiently operational terms, without compromising the visionary and long-term nature of the plan and duplicating the function of the work programmes covering the intersessional periods between MOPs?

Should goals be formulated in qualitative terms only or would it be possible to formulate certain targets in quantitative terms?

(c) Indicative types of activity

Should specific activities be indicated in respect of each goal/objective?

What would be the appropriate level of specificity and detail?

Should this include relevant activities at all levels or only common activities falling within the work programme of the Convention?

(d) Implementing partners

Should implementing partners be identified for each individual objective or even specific activity or should (categories of) partners be addressed in general terms?

Who are the relevant partners to be covered?

(e) Framework for implementation of the strategic plan

What exactly does the notion “framework for implementation” refer to in the context of a long-term strategic plan?

Should this element be developed in matrix or tabular form or in narrative form?

How should the issue of necessary resources for implementation be addressed?

Marc Pallemarts
5 October 2006