

DECISION III/2

ELECTRONIC INFORMATION TOOLS AND THE CLEARINGHOUSE MECHANISM

adopted at the third meeting of the Parties
held in Riga on 11-13 June 2008

The Meeting of the Parties,

Recalling the provisions of articles 4 and 5 of the Convention,

Recalling also decisions I/6 and II/3,

Recognizing that facilitating increased public access to environmental information contributes significantly to strengthening the protection of the environment and improving the management of natural resources,

Noting that information and communications technologies (ICT) are enabling a vastly larger population than at any time in the past to share and expand the base of knowledge about the environment and to participate in environmental decision-making in support of sustainable development,

Noting also the outcome of the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis from 16 to 18 November 2005, in particular the Tunis Commitment and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, and its relevance to furthering the objectives of the Convention,

Resolving to give practical effect to those conclusions of the second phase of the World Summit relevant to the promotion of environmental democracy,

Welcoming the increasing use of ICT by Governments in the UNECE region to make a wider range of environmental information accessible to the public,

Noting, however, that more limited progress has been made in using ICT to facilitate the involvement of citizens in environmental decision-making,

1. *Notes with appreciation* the work undertaken by the Task Force on Electronic Information Tools established pursuant to decisions I/6 and II/3 and expresses its gratitude to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for its leadership of the Task Force since the second meeting of the Parties;
2. *Notes in particular* the replies given by Parties, Signatories and other stakeholders to the questionnaires circulated on the implementation of the recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools to provide public access to environmental information;

3. *Urges* Governments, using the potential of ICT, to create and/or maintain public systems of information on environmental laws, regulations and other priority categories of information as set out in the recommendations contained in decision II/3, envisaging a wider development of public access points and supporting the broad availability of this information;

4. *Encourages* countries that have not yet taken steps to use the full potential for ICT as a means to significantly improve the involvement of the public in environmental decision-making to develop adequately resourced national programmes and strategies for e-participation in such decision-making, and in particular:

(a) To develop and implement e-government and e-participation applications at all levels, thereby furthering access to government information and services and enabling the public to participate electronically in environmental decision-making;

(b) To strengthen the creation of quality e-content addressing environmental information, at the regional, national and international levels;

(c) To promote ICT education and training, where appropriate through partnerships;

5. *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 on the dissemination of environmental information and the promotion of public participation in environmental decision-making through electronic means;

6. *Invites* Parties, Signatories and other interested States, where they have not already done so, to establish national nodes of the Clearinghouse, and encourages them, as well as international, regional and non-governmental organizations, academic and other research institutions, and other members of the public, to submit relevant information for inclusion in the Clearinghouse;

7. *Requests* the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, based on the request of its member States and within approved budgetary resources, to assist those member States in the development of subregional ICT strategies;

8. *Further requests* the secretariat, subject to the availability of human and financial resources, to support the implementation of capacity-building measures, such as:

(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 clearinghouse mechanism, including the application of guidance materials and a programme of training workshops in support of capacity-building on electronic information tools and the clearinghouse mechanism;

9. *Decides* to extend in time the mandate of the Task Force on Electronic Information Tools with the following programme of work subject to the availability of financial and human resources:

(a) Identifying capacity-building needs, barriers and solutions with respect to electronic access to environmental information, including in the context of public participation and access to justice, and support for implementation of capacity-building measures, such as:

- (i) Enabling or facilitating partnerships in capacity-building activities;
- (ii) Organizing, as appropriate, workshops or training courses;

(b) Promoting shared approaches to and standards for systems providing public access to environmental information to meet user requirements for information at different geographical and political levels;

(c) Updating and sharing examples of good practice through:

- (i) Further documentation of case studies in the use of ICT to promote public access to environmental information and public participation in environment-related decision-making, e.g. through an updated and expanded compendium;
- (ii) Assessing progressive improvements with respect to the accessibility of environmental information, by further use and development of the questionnaire on implementation of the recommendations in decision II/3;
- (iii) Surveying relevant national electronic information access strategies;
- (iv) Organizing, as appropriate, expert meetings or mini-conferences to exchange information on good practices;

(d) Monitoring technical developments at the regional, national and international levels, and, where appropriate and possible using available resources, contributing to other regional initiatives relevant to electronic information access, electronic public participation in decision-making, and electronic access to justice in environmental matters;

(e) Supporting the maintenance and further development of the clearinghouse mechanism, including through further developing the Convention's online reporting system;

(f) Developing strategic communication strategies, including methods and actions to identify types of users of environmental information, their particular needs and the subsequent targeting of services based on electronic tools to meet them, to further implementation of the Convention;

10. *Welcomes* the offer of the United Kingdom to lead the work of the Task Force.
