

THIRD MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE AARHUS CONVENTION
Riga, Latvia, 11-13 June 2008

Welcome address by Mr. Gundars Daudze
Speaker of the Latvian Parliament (Saeima)

Mister Minister, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen!

On behalf of the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia let me greet you in the capital city of the country – Riga! I am convinced that time spent in our city and country will bring you plenty of positive emotions and, of course, that it will be of use also from the business point of view, as within the framework of today's third meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention leading environment and environmental protection specialists from many countries have gathered here.

Problems of environmental protection and environmental matters today are on the top of agendas all over the world. Environmental problems are brought forward in parliaments of states, in leading mass media, in public. They are also much discussed in the European Union, where priority is assigned to the solution of environmental problems. Therefore special attention should be paid to achieving agreement on common principles, common understanding and joint action between global countries and governments to be able to coordinate work on implementation of true *environmental democracy*.

Under environmental democracy I mean not only principles set by the Aarhus Convention on rights of every public member to obtain information, to participate in decision making on environmental matters or rights to legally address judicial authorities on issues concerned with environmental protection. True environmental democracy will only be achieved when not only will every public member be aware of his rights in environmental matters, but also when parliaments and governments of all countries will be truly ready to contribute to minimisation of climate changes and prevention of ecological catastrophes. To solve these global problems we need a global approach – international agreements, like the Aarhus Convention or the Kyoto Protocol.

I am truly content that Latvia, the parliament and the government of our country have contributed to observance of the Aarhus Convention principles into legislative documents passed by our parliament and implementation of those into the environmental policy of our country. It is of utmost importance that Latvia has taken care for implementation of the main Convention principle – participation of public and environmental non-governmental organisations in legislative processes. Thus the main goal is achieved: every public member, through non-governmental organisations

can influence legislative initiatives and laws passed, and therefore be directly participating in the making of proper and future based environmental legislation.

The Aarhus Convention is an international agreement imposing specific obligations on governments of states and setting main principles of environmental policy for countries that have signed it. Ten years of operation of the Convention have ascertained a need for such a universally conjunctive framework setting main policy principles. It is necessary so that not only parliaments and governments, but every public member will have clear awareness of his rights and obligations.

And our obligations in front of today's and of the coming generations are vast – starting from the understanding that environmental matters are the ones that will not get solved by themselves. If we will understand that we ourselves are the environment of our planet and that we ourselves create the environment of our planet, we hopefully will be able to join forces in saving this environment.

Ladies and gentlemen!

I wish you all interesting and fruitful discussions. And, of course, to reach an agreement in adopting the Riga declaration that would set priorities for effective implementation of the Aarhus Convention principles in Europe and elsewhere in the world.

I wish you a successful day, and great results!

Thank you for your attention!