

Dear Excellencies, colleagues, distinguished participants,

It is my honour to open the third Aarhus Convention Meeting of the Parties here, in Riga. The meeting where we have to look back assessing our achievements and lessons learned in implementing the Aarhus Convention and where we have to look ahead and agree a Long-Term Strategic Plan, thus providing a framework for the future work under the Aarhus Convention.

As we all know, the Aarhus Convention was adopted in 1998 and on its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary it would be very relevant to discuss our achievements in implementing one of the most far-reaching international treaties in the field of environmental democracy which raises environmental rights to the level of other human rights.

I would also like to point out that in the same year the Aarhus Convention was adopted important amendments were made in the Constitution of Latvia whereby the right to live in a safe and healthy environment was admitted as a human right. For us, this is yet another reason why during this meeting it would be very relevant to discuss what lessons have the Parties to the Aarhus Convention learned from the implementation of the Convention on the national level.

I have to admit that ensuring the right to live in a safe and healthy environment as one of the basic human rights is a very challenging task for the Ministry of Environment in a such rapidly developing country as Latvia.

On the one hand, there is a common understanding that everybody has a right to live in an environment that is favourable to one's his health and well-being. However the individual action often does not support this objective – and I believe this is the case in many other countries as well.

It is therefore important to ensure effective and appropriate implementation of international instruments such as the Aarhus Convention that guides Parties as well as other states on how better to protect and safeguard the right to a safe and healthy environment.

Dear colleagues,

This will be already the second meeting at which we will have an opportunity to review and discuss results of National implementation Reports and of the Compliance Committee conclusions. This is a very good basis for assessing the work already done as well as the remaining challenges.

I am sure that these days we will use effectively to agree upon priorities of our work to ensure effective implementation of the Convention in the future. It is important that all three pillars of the Convention is adequately reflected in a work programme for next period as we can better achieve the main objectives of the Aarhus Convention if **all of the three pillars** of the Convention have been implemented.

The agenda for our meeting seems to be quite challenging – as is always the case when you have to agree upon a joint framework for the future despite having a different background and set-up from country to country. Nevertheless I am convinced that an agreement will be reached in very friendly and cooperative spirit and I wish you very successful discussions and fruitful Meeting.

In conclusion, I would like to say that it is a great honour for the government of Latvia to host this Meeting of the Parties in Riga during which we also can all celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Aarhus Convention. To mark this special occasion we are organising a gala concert tomorrow evening to which all of you are warmly welcome.

Thank you!