

**Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation
in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters**
Fourth session
Chisinau, 29 June - 1 July 2011
High-Level Segment

**Statement by Ms. Desiree Schweitzer, Deputy Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and
Environmental Activities**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to address you in this first session of the high level segment of the Fourth Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention. Let me thank the Government of Moldova, particularly His Excellency Mr. Salaru, for his hospitality and his warm welcome to this beautiful city of Chisinau and the UNECE for organizing this meeting and giving us, the OSCE, the opportunity to be with you.

Today, we have an important topic for debate. The past two decades after the Rio Conference have witnessed a number of positive global trends in economic, social and environmental fields. Despite positive developments, considerable implementation gaps and challenges remain, and these will be addressed as part of the Rio+20 agenda.

When we look at our region, there is reason to be proud of the successes the Aarhus Convention has brought about. It has been a major step forward in advancing sustainable development through strengthening democracy and environmental protection.

Allow me to say a few words about the OSCE perspective on sustainable development.

The OSCE is first and foremost a security organization. Our cooperation in the economic and environmental fields is an important and integral component of our comprehensive approach to security.

My Office, the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, as well as the OSCE Field Operations are actively engaged in awareness-raising, capacity-building and good governance activities in countries in the region that are in economic, environmental and social transition. Our activities are designed to build confidence and prevent conflicts between participating States, by supporting economic reform, by strengthening environmental governance, and by identifying economic and environmental threats to security and fostering dialogue to find solutions.

In its efforts at addressing the environment and security link, the OSCE has joined forces with five partner agencies, UNECE, UNDP, UNEP, REC, and NATO as an associate partner in the Environment and Security – or ENVSEC - Initiative. ENVSEC is dedicated to finding solutions for environmental hazards before they cross national borders and cause political instability. It aims at transforming risks into opportunities for cooperation.

“Information”, “participation” and “partnerships” in the Rio spirit are cornerstones of environmental security. In this respect, we consider the Aarhus Convention an exceptional tool to promote good environmental governance within and between States. We carry out a

series of concrete initiatives to catalyse national efforts to implement the Aarhus Convention - all built in partnerships with the Government and civil society.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this point, allow me to revert to the big question posed to our panel today: Has the Aarhus Convention succeeded in supporting sustainable development in the UNECE region?

Yes, I believe this is the case. The Aarhus Convention has had an impact on the advancement of sustainable development through the implementation of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration. Environmental governance has been visibly on the agenda across the region over the last decade. This is owed in part to the normative force of the Convention buttressed by an efficient implementation review mechanism. As a result the Aarhus Convention has been more effective in sustaining commitment than some less formal instruments in the field of sustainable development.

The Convention is unique in the extent to which it promotes citizens' environmental rights. Its core principles – the right to information, the right to participate and the right to seek access to justice – empower ordinary people to play a greater role in advancing sustainable development in their country.

In many countries, I would add, this success manifests itself in a growing network of Aarhus Centres and in the way they reach out to the civil society. OSCE has been supporting the establishment and functioning of Aarhus Centres in a number of countries since 2002. Having started out only in a few locations in the early 2000s, 31 Centres now form a sizable network spanning 10 countries. We are happy about Moldova's intention to join the network.

We are thankful to the Aarhus Convention Secretariat for their continued guidance to the Aarhus Centres Initiative. We are also thankful to our participating States hosting Aarhus Centres that provide technical, human and financial resources in support of them. We are of course also grateful to our donors, the Governments Belgium, Canada, Finland, Norway, Spain and Sweden for their contributions throughout the years.

Allow me also at this point also to express my gratitude and strong appreciation for the commitment of Aarhus Centre stakeholders in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Serbia and Tajikistan in putting the Aarhus Convention into practice .

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To be sure, many challenges remain in the implementation of the Aarhus Convention, notably in the area of public participation. I am confident that the renewed Rio spirit will revitalize the commitment at all levels for implementation of the Aarhus Convention.

The Draft Chisinau Declaration before us positions the Aarhus Convention in relation to sustainable development, and the Green Economy transition in particular, and postulates that citizens should participate in the design and implementation of green economy programmes.

The provisions of the Aarhus Convention, and the expertise created in the course of its implementation at the national level will be instrumental in ensuring that citizens have a say in the transition to the green economy. This applies to social, economic, as well as environmental policies, which will need to converge strongly in a green economy. Good practice from implementation of the Aarhus Convention should be considered in this process. The Aarhus Centres could support this process, facilitating the outreach of governments to civil society. Thus, they have an important role to play on the Road to Rio+20 and beyond.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before concluding, allow me to add one more thing.

The agenda for Rio+20 is comprehensive and ambitious, and rightly so. What it is still missing, however, is an appreciation of the links between sustainable development - and environmental governance in particular - and security. The ENVSEC Initiative, being a broad partnership between six specialized agencies could fill this gap and offer its security expertise to the preparatory process of Rio+20.

In a first step, ENVSEC, chaired by the OSCE this year, will bring this security perspective on sustainable development to the Astana Environment for Europe Conference in September.

We hope to have the opportunity to make this case also at the UNECE regional preparatory meeting for Rio+20 in December.

Thank you very much, Ladies and Gentlemen.
