

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

General Segment

Item 4 (e):

Substantive issues: public participation in international forums

**Statement by Italy
delivered by Ms. Giuliana Gasparrini, Italian focal point**

Mr Chairman of the Convention, excellencies, high representatives of the UN ECE, delegates, colleagues,

It gives me a great pleasure to address the audience on the important item of public participation in international forums.

The interest of Italy for the debate about the implementation of art.3.7 dates back from the very beginning, when the Convention came into force. When the proposal of developing guidelines on this issue came out and gained support we decided to provide the chairmanship for this exercise which eventually ended up at MOP2 with the adoption of the Almaty Guidelines. The Guidelines in our view have been the backbone for the implementation of art.3.7 by Parties as well as of value for IFs themselves and a strong benchmark for the work of the TF on Public Participation in International Forums led by France during the last 6 years. They have been quoted by Aarhus Parties in several occasions during negotiations within MEAs and other International forums related to the environment and in some cases taken into account.

It has been widely recognized that, in order to promote PPIF, it is both necessary an effort from the international forums dealing with environment in its collectivity and an effort from single actors at the national level. One side, the active involvement of IFs is essential: let me draw your attention to the excellent work by the TF and the Secretariat in preparing an information document of good practices and challenges for PP in International forums, which should be regularly updated. On the other side, we see, in order to influence the practices in IFs, it is necessary for the Parties to act and propose good practices both within the negotiations and in the shaping of national positions at home.

In this regard, let me share the experiences and the attempts of Italy to advance the implementation of PP practices during last year:

As I mentioned, in order to further the Convention's principles in international forums Italy has strongly supported and provided leadership for the drafting, adoption and application of the Almaty guidelines on PPIF. There are a number of examples of efforts to promote the Convention's principles in such forums, and in particular in the Commission on Sustainable Development, in UNEP Governing Council, and in the three Rio Conventions (on climate change, biodiversity and desertification), both within the European Union

and trying to convince other States not Party to the Convention, especially subscribing for the extensive interpretation of rules of procedures in favour of observers participation.

At home, in order to raise the awareness of our own officials dealing with international negotiations in environmental forums, we have organized an internal consultation on the Almaty Guidelines, also involving the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, in order to raise the awareness of the public and in particular of NGOs, we have organized a national workshop to inform the civil society with regard to public participation in international forums and to collect experiences of participation and indications by Italian NGOs. It is also general praxis that, when Italy hosts an international event, it invites the civil society to actively participate. This was the case for example with the International Forum on Partnership for Sustainable Development in Rome, with a series of events on bioenergy and climate change, with the G8-Environment in Siracusa and with the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in Parma.

With regard to participation in international conferences on environment and sustainable development, preparatory meetings are usually held at the national level for the major events (e.g. Summits on Sustainable Development and the United Nations Convention on Climate Change), with the participation of major groups. In certain cases, NGOs and other stakeholders form part of the Italian delegation. Let me describe the example of the Italian delegation dealing with climate change, which includes an NGO's representative (at the present time a senior representative of WWF-Italy). Some academics are involved on a long term basis on technical or scientific aspects of the negotiations. Private sector is also involved. This practice is appreciated by NGOs because the internal coordination on the spot helps the NGOs representative to be aware of what is happening and allow a timely and informed interaction. On the other side NGOs representatives can organize meetings between members of the governmental delegation and experts from international NGOs who can expose their point of view and put their technical expertise at the disposal of the governmental delegation.

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It is clear that the collective actions at the international level and the domestic actions undertaken by single Parties are both necessary and complementary and mutually supportive. The challenge to enhance PP is to find the most effective and suitable mix of the 2 types of actions, with the ultimate goal to have a strengthened and meaningful public participation, where the opinions of civil society have an influence on the final collective decisions by the Governments.

Let me invite you to start a discussion on this issue which can continue during the next intersessional period. In fact now, after the work of the TF to promote the diffusion and implement the Almaty Guidelines during the last 6 years, the will of the Parties is going in the direction to task the Working Group of the Parties to

continue the discussion on the implementation of art.3.7. Then let me underline the importance that a clear political statement of support for this activity should come by this Meeting of the Parties. On the tools and modalities to conduct the work , let me recall in particular the utility of thematic workshops which examine the situation in specific forums and draw interesting good practices.

Something that we have to evaluate is the impact of the Almaty Guidelines on PP procedures in IFs which already had some provisions on this issue and the impact of the Guidelines on negotiations of new instruments (for example the ongoing negotiations on mercury and on climate change). These are the key questions:

Which practical arrangements and mechanisms maximize the positive impact of public participation? What have Aarhus Parties found to be the most successful and effective ways to involve the public at the national level in international forums in which they take part? What obstacles have they encountered in trying to promote the principles of the Convention in international forums, and what could be done to reduce those obstacles? What are the strategies and practices implemented by the Aarhus Parties in order to reach favourable decisions on civil society involvement within each forum? In this sense there is a lot to be done. Finally, we know how important is to continue positive outreach toward environmental International Forums; to this end the MOP should give a clear mandate to the Aarhus Secretariat to further pursue this task.

I hope these few ideas on the scope and on the possible conduct of the work ahead can inspire the Parties: I wish all of us a fruitful discussion!