

**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**

**Statement by Mr. Marco Keiner,
Director of UNECE Environment Division,
at the opening of the plenary session
Wednesday, 29 June 2011**

Your excellences, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the secretariat of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe I would like to warmly welcome you to the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention.

This session marks a happy occasion - the tenth anniversary of the Convention's entry into force. It is with a great deal of pride that we can look back on the progress the Convention has made since its entry into force on 30 October 2001 following its ratification by the 16th Party (incidentally Armenia, on 1 August 2001). Ten years later, we now have 44 Parties from the UNECE region, with recent announcements indicating that there may be several more in the near future. However, despite the good news of the growing Aarhus family, as the agenda items to be discussed this week show, there is still much work to be done to ensure the real and effective implementation of each of the three pillars. In this respect, I consider that the growing caseload of the Convention's Compliance Committee is a healthy sign that the public trigger is working effectively as a constructive and transparent tool to identify issues of compliance that need further work. Likewise, the genuine inclusion of the public in the preparation of the national implementation reports submitted to this session is also proving a useful tool to discuss practical issues of compliance with concerned members of the public.

I am particularly looking forward to this week's High Level Segment which I hope will provide a strong message to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) to be held in Rio de Janeiro next year. The Aarhus Convention must stand as one of the best, if not the best, examples of the Rio Declaration brought to life. It would thus be very fitting if Aarhus Convention Parties could offer their experience to support the realization of Principle 10 beyond the UNECE region. However, I am sure we will have more time to think about that on Friday.

As the Chair has said, in the plenary session during the next two days, we are here to assess Parties' own progress in implementing their obligations under the Convention, to review the workplan and to consider our future work. Having studied the draft decisions, and the draft work programme 2012-2014, I can see there are many exciting opportunities ahead to ensure that the beginning of Aarhus' second decade is just as rewarding as its first. I encourage Parties to consider novel ways to coordinate internally between their officials working on different but related issues and ministries in order to build synergies, avoid duplication and avoid inconsistencies at the national level. I also take this opportunity to thank Parties for their continued financial support, particularly in the economic climate of late, without which the realisation of the Convention's work programme would not be possible.

Thank you for your attention.