

**Statement by Ms Sulhiya Sodiqova,
Aarhus Center Dushanbe, Tajikistan
Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention
Joint High-level Segment
Budva, 14 September 2017**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished Colleagues,

I am the director of Aarhus Centre in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Today, I am honoured to be given the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Aarhus Centres.

We would like to express our thanks to the Government of Montenegro for hosting us. We would also like to extend our appreciation to the UNECE for convening this meeting, and to the OSCE for facilitating our participation.

2017 marks the **15th year of the Aarhus Centres**. We are a growing network. We are located in **14 countries with 60 members**.

We are based in different cities, countries and regions but we have a lot common when it comes to environmental challenges. This meeting provided us with the opportunity to take part and contribute to the discussion on achievements and challenges with regard to implementation of the Aarhus Convention. It also enabled us - the Aarhus Centre Managers - to get together with our peers from other countries and share our experiences and lessons learned.

We are glad to note that the Budva Declaration recognizes our bridging role between public authorities and civil society as part of our contribution to the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and to environmental democracy in a broader context. The side event earlier today demonstrated how these principles are put into concrete action on the ground.

The Budva Declaration encourages us to continue our efforts in promoting transparency and facilitating public participation. In doing so, we primarily contribute to the **Sustainable Development Goal 16 on Peaceful and Inclusive Societies** as well as to other environmental targets of the 2030 Agenda.

It is upon all our organizations and every one of us to make the commitments enshrined in the Convention, PRTR Protocol and the 2030 Agenda a reality.

Thank you.