

**Thematic Session “Promotion of the principles of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) in international forums
4 September 2012**

Presented by Ms. Joanna Cornelius at the Session 2 - *Measures taken at the national level to systematically promote public participation in international forums*

The NGOs want to stress the importance of Public Participation in International Forums as affirmed in the Almaty Guidelines. Public participation contributes to the quality of decision-making on environmental matters in international forums by bringing different opinions and expertise to the process and increasing transparency and accountability.

The Aarhus Convention’s work on Public Participation in International Forums is already improving international environmental governance by promoting the principles of the Convention in various international forums. We would like to bring your attention and give our appreciation to the UNECE which organised the session on public participation in international environmental governance at the Rio+20 Summit.

The Task Force on Public Participation in International Forums showed success in their task to promote Public Participation, for example by providing a forum for discussions in relation to European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the climate negotiations. We believe the Task Force could have a great potential for continuing to improve governance in these areas as well as in new processes.

As you know, the Task Force has, for the time being, been disbanded, and the Working Group of the Parties will oversee Public Participation in International Forums. It is of great importance that sufficient time, focus and resources are allocated during meetings of the Working Group to carry out this task. We would like to call for a performance review of this matter to see whether the Working Group has been able to fulfil this mandate and whether the Task Force needs to be revived.

We encourage the Parties to ask the Secretariat to further provide advisory assistance to interested international bodies to continue to promote Aarhus principles in other international forums, such as the Espoo Convention, climate and biodiversity negotiations and international financial processes. We also call upon the European Union to apply Aarhus principles to its

policies.

For all Aarhus Parties (and particularly for EECCA countries) it is vital that the public have effective channels of direct input into international environmental processes that are separate from input at the national level.

The main focus of this session is on what happens at national level to systematically promote public participation in international forums. As can be seen in the background paper for this thematic session with extracts from the National implementation reports on article 3 paragraph 7, there is a wide variation in the quality of reporting on this provision. You can see improvements between the different reporting cycles in some countries, all though still some countries are not reporting. Also, in some reports can be read that not much has been done. So, some progress has been in relation to promoting public participation in environmental bodies. But, we would like to note that little or no progress has been demonstrated in other forums which have big implications for the environment: such forums dealing with trade, finance, energy etc. What we can see is that the parties have failed regarding to apply the Article to bodies that are not primarily environmental.

We would here like to recall the Report from the sixth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Convention in 2006 with its list of international forums. The list is an indicative and based on its consideration of four criteria; the number of members in the forum, the presence of Aarhus members in the forum, the proportion of the forum's decisions or actions affecting the environment and whether the forum's decisions or actions are considered to have the potential for particularly significant environmental impacts.

We note that by this Report some progress was made, but, even though this is not a comprehensive list; the listed forums represent only a subset of the full range of international forums dealing with matters relating to the environment in the sense of article 3 paragraph 7 of the Convention, it is still far wider than the range the parties report of.

Therefore, the working group should call on the parties to apply article 3 para 7 in the full range of forums covered in this list, as a reference point, and agree on a more systematic and comprehensive reporting by parties on this issue, to improve effectiveness. The reporting should show the steps taken to involve the public and to promote the principles of the Convention in all bodies and forums that article 3 para 7 is covering.