



Negotiation of a regional agreement on access rights in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC Principle 10)

Twentieth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention

At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, the Declaration on the application of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean was signed. In this Declaration, signatory countries committed, with the support of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UN ECLAC) as technical secretariat, to advance the implementation of a regional agreement for the full implementation of the rights of access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters.

Open to all Latin American and Caribbean countries, the process has been making progress through regular meetings and the adoption of documents. In November 2014, the countries launched the negotiation phase of the regional agreement and established a Negotiating Committee with a view to concluding its functions by December 2016. The process is coordinated by the Presiding Officers, comprising Chile and Costa Rica as co-chairs and Argentina, Mexico, Peru, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago.

Thus far, the Declaration has been signed by 21 countries, being Grenada the last country to adhere in April 2016 (Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay).

More information on the process is available at: <http://www.eclac.org/en/principle10>

Through this process, Latin America and the Caribbean countries are demonstrating that they can tackle common challenges and strengthen regional environmental governance under a cooperation and capacity-building approach, thereby contributing to social and economic progress with environmental sustainability. While pursuing its own path to strengthen environmental access rights, the region is also keen to learn from other successful practices and experiences, most particularly from the Aarhus Convention. UN ECLAC would therefore like to express its recognition and high appreciation for the continuous support provided by the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat to date.

Main developments since June 2015

- After the first meeting of the negotiating committee (Santiago, May 2015), where the organization and work plan was adopted, the countries agreed to carry out internal national consultations on the preliminary document prepared by ECLAC at the request of countries and present language proposals on the document by August 31st. The Committee met again in Panama City (October 2015) and Montevideo (April 2016), where progress was made in the negotiation of the regional

agreement based on the document prepared by the Presiding Officers that gathers the language proposals of countries and compiles them into the preliminary document.

- The process itself has generated a wave of positive actions that are contributing to strengthening access rights in all countries of the region. With the negotiations of the regional agreement, the issue has climbed up the political agenda of countries. Governments have begun to develop a greater number of activities and enter into dialogue with civil society in an unprecedented way, resulting in enhanced outreach and capacity building on these issues. In addition, civil society has begun to organize and establish networks to influence the negotiation process.
- The current moment is crucial. As the negotiation on substantive matters of the regional agreement moves forward, the exchange of experiences and lessons learned from the implementation of the Aarhus Convention has become fundamental. In this context, the strengthening of cooperation with and support of UNECE as well as the Parties to the Aarhus Convention is of paramount importance to help maintain the current political will and momentum.
- The exchange of experiences between regions and the provision of assistance to Latin America and the Caribbean civil society organizations has also proven to be key to ensure the significant participation of the public. During the past years, the region has benefited from the project Building Bridges, led by the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) with the support of the Government of The Netherlands.

Next steps

- The fourth meeting of the negotiating committee will take place in the Dominican Republic from 9 to 12 August 2016. It is expected that countries will negotiate articles 6 to 10 on the basis of the third version of the compilation text and review the outstanding matters from the preamble to article 10. More information is available at: <http://negociacionp10.cepal.org>
- For UN ECLAC, the ultimate objective of the regional agreement must be the strengthening of environmental governance and the realization the right to live in a healthy and sustainable environment through the full application in Latin American and the Caribbean of the access rights enshrined in Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, under an approach based on cooperation and capacity building that enables the Parties to improve their laws, policies, institutions and practices to guarantee that those rights are fully observed and implemented.
- Therefore, capacity building will continue to be a priority in the near future, offering multiple opportunities for bilateral/regional cooperation among Aarhus Parties and the Latin America and the Caribbean region.
- As the international community embarks on an ambitious path towards the sustainable development, it becomes clear full and effective application of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration is at the heart of the Agenda 2030 as it guarantees that all persons, particularly those in vulnerable situations, have access to timely and reliable information, can participate significantly in the decisions that affect their lives and have access to justice in environmental matters, thereby placing the equality at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals.