



Aarhus Storytelling

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Opening statement

Dear Distinguished members of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to attend this meeting of the Parties of the Aarhus Convention at its twenty second meeting. I am honored to chair this session on storytelling from the negotiations of the Aarhus Convention. Let me briefly present myself: I was one of two Danish delegates who negotiated the Aarhus Convention on behalf of Denmark. The other Danish negotiator was Mr. Veit Koester and he has asked me to convey greetings to all of you today. At present my duties in the Ministry of Environment and Food is mainly on the Nagoya Protocol on access to genetic resources and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their use which is another internationally binding UN instrument.

This session will introduce you to some of the stories behind the convention. It will take you down memory lane and perhaps it will give you more insight into how difficult the negotiations of the Convention itself occasionally were. It will also present stories about furthering some of the provisions of the Convention.

The purpose of this session is to showcase and to celebrate the Convention. As such it will be a no-negotiation session with the aim of showing respect to the history of the Aarhus Convention.

Before introducing the speakers let me start by giving you a couple of examples from the negotiations as I recall them.

I will start by highlighting the Chair of the negotiation Mr. Willem Kakkebeeke. He was a very competent chair though some of us felt that he sometimes was fairly spacious and too patient. Mostly, he was generous by allowing delegations to explain their positions in lengthy interventions. However, when a delegation had, let's say, misused his patience by repeating its positions too much, he certainly also knew how to stop it. He simply responded:

“Thank you X – country for this intervention which was not very fruitful”.

He had a delicate knowledge about when to push delegates and when it was not appropriate. He was clear and firm in his signals and guidance. He guided us through the negotiations and we trusted him as chair. We all relied on his sense of justice.

Though Willem today has passed away I would like to thank him post-festum. He did a tremendous job during the negotiations and I am personally very grateful for having been under his auspices. It was great pleasure.

Another case I would like to highlight is the engagement of the NGOs. The negotiation of the Aarhus Convention had an unprecedented participation of the NGOs. It was challenging for the delegates and sometimes it made the negotiations very difficult.

However, it also made the negotiations more colorful and the result remarkable and unique. NGOs were engaged and well-prepared for the negotiations, and also for the special occasions where we had joint dinners and it was time to have fun.

I particularly recall the last negotiation meeting in Rome March 1998 where we were all invited for a dinner by the Italian government.

Here they presented a song called the Battle Hymn of the NGO where the essence was to express in a humorous way all that they wanted to achieve – namely recognition – and that they have a role to play.

Closing Statement

Distinguished members of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank all keynote speakers. They have all played an instrumental role during the negotiations of the convention as well as in furthering some of the provisions that were not perfectly finalized during the negotiations of the Convention itself. All speakers during this storytelling session have shown in different ways that much has been achieved. I will highlight the protocol on PRTR and the compliance committee and the linkages to the SDGs, which illustrates the potential in the convention and that it is a living instrument. I thank all the speakers.

The Aarhus Convention was the diamond of the Aarhus Conference in 1998. The delegations and the chair Willem

Kakkebeekes underlined the improvements achieved not least due to the participation of the NGOs.

Finally, allow me to express how the spirit of the negotiations was by a quotation:

“Optimism is the faith that leads to achievements. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.”

The quotation is from the famous author Hellen Keller who managed to be an author despite she was born blind and deaf.

To me, the quotation expresses accurately and timely the success of the finalization of the negotiations of the Aarhus Conventions. No one mentioned and no one forgotten.

For me personally, it was a wonderful experience to be a part of the creation of the Aarhus Convention.

Thank you very much