

20 June 2018

**Terre des Hommes**  
**Statement to Aarhus Convention – 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration**

**“Youth, Aarhus, and the SDGs”**

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak during this special session looking at how Aarhus rights can assist the young generation to call for sustainable development.

The UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, John Knox, made it very clear in his earlier presentation: This is a very timely discussion. States have a heightened duty to protect children because they are more vulnerable to environmental harm than any other group.

But States can only effectively protect children if they enable them to exercise their rights to information, participation and justice in environmental matters. The interventions by the youth present here today offer a brief glimpse of the various ways in which young people from around the world express themselves on the environment. The topic matters to them.

Thanks to a number of initiatives undertaken in recent years, we have already developed a fairly good understanding of the relationship between children’s rights and the environment.

These include, inter alia, the 2016 Day of General Discussion of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child that gathered over 250 global experts to discuss the relevance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child for environmental policy.

In addition to John Knox, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and toxics, Mr. Baskut Tuncakt, UNICEF and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights have all produced reports that focus on children’s rights and the environment and pay close attention to access rights.

I represent Terre des Hommes, a non - governmental organization that works for children’s rights and sustainable development in 67 countries. Terre des Hommes has played an active role in bringing together experts from the environmental and the children’s rights field.

Child rights experts know a lot about the rights to information, participation and remedy as they apply to children in e.g. juvenile justice or minor refugees. However, they still often lack the expertise to bring access rights to bear in the environmental context.

The Aarhus Convention does so much to promote environmental protection through these rights. It would be a truly pioneering work to make the knowledge and experience built over 20 years available to children so that they, too, have access to information, participation and justice in environmental matters. It would be relevant to the Parties and to all other actors working on children's rights and the environment as well as in relation to a number of environment-related agreements, including the SDGs.

To make sure Aarhus rights help children and youth to create a sustainable future, Parties to the Convention should consider the following:

- 1.) To produce an easy-to-understand format of the Aarhus Convention that makes the text accessible to children in a language that they can understand. Children can only exercise their rights if they are able to comprehend them. An accessible introduction to Rio Principle 10 could even become a joint project under the Aarhus and the Escazu Agreements, thus allowing a larger group of children to benefit from it.
- 2.) To strengthen the implementation of the Aarhus Convention by clarifying the requirements that have to be met to allow children proper access to information, participation and justice in environmental matters. To this end, the Convention bodies could engage in a dialogue with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the institution that monitors children's rights globally, including the rights to information, participation and access to justice. Such an initiative would be very beneficial to the ongoing debate on the overall relationship between children's rights and the environment.

To end, it is important that Aarhus rights help all children and youth to exercise their rights with a view to creating a sustainable future, including younger children.

Thank you very much!