

AARHUS STORYTELLING

Stories Part II – Convention’s Implementation in the Region and its Global Significance

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- Harassment of environmental defenders
 - State policies & private parties’ harassment: We witness increasing number of specific cases of harassment of environmental activists, and even murders (as presented at last MOP). This a result of not just targeted actions by private industries, but also by states. While there are sub-regional differences within the UNECE, the harassment is not just “non-EU” problem.
 - The Aarhus Convention response – **the AC needs to offer protection to environmental activists, those people who trusted the convention principles. It needs to take the lead by establishing a special procedure/mechanism to monitor & react timely to specific cases. At least within “Aarhus” pillars, but better beyond.**
 - Threat to participatory democracy - **What’s terrifying** , in some UNECE member states governments are developing, or have already developed, policies aimed to targeting environmental civil society or limiting the space for environmental activists
- Shrinking democratic space
 - Aarhus perspective to the problem
 - The problem:
 - governments have introduced restrictive laws limiting the operations of civil society organizations.
 - Some regimes also use a range of other – formal and informal – tactics to disadvantage CSOs (like “divide and rule between different elements of civil society”).
 - In some countries, the mere issue of “foreign funding” is used widely to formally limit CSOs operations or build up negative public opinion.
 - Aarhus perspective:
 - NGOs are attacked by SLAPPs in
 - Attacks via media are common
 - Active NGOs are “replaced” by GANGOs (government-associated NGOs)
 - Citizens can’t raise their voice, including via social networks, “the right to object” is still to be protected
 - Apart from civil rights organizations, environmental NGOs are most vulnerable and attacked
 - Is there a response?
 - Political? Institutional? Financial?
 - Aarhus is capable to contribute to addressing deeper, structural aspects
 - Aarhus cannot simply stay ready to face it; Aarhus needs to proactively protect its values, principles and rights.
- Access to information

- Post-truth politics culture phenomenon – poses a special challenge to environmental protection, in particular areas which are science-dependent, for example climate change
- Aarhus was negotiated before many of today's technologies were widely used: social media, open data and block chain are among them. Citizens are increasingly dependent on such means. While generally these tools offer better access, their misuse and complexity may have negative effect
- Lastly. There's a need to improve and broaden women's access to information and communications technologies, incl. e-governance tools, in order to enable political participation and promote engagement in broader democratic processes - respect the needs of women/girls and those who may be marginalized to these technologies. More generally we need to integrate/mainstream gender considerations within the work of the AC and its Protocols.
- We are all and each of us ambassadors of the Aarhus ideas, no matter what differences we may have at international meetings. Thank you, friends.