



Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention
and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer

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Registers
Secretariat
Environment Division
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
Palais des Nations, Av. de la Paix 10
1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland

Dear Chair of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention,

To be addressed to the - Chair of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention: UNFCCC Observer engagement is a key component of inclusive participation of all stakeholders who play a key role in the climate change process. It enables accredited observers and stakeholders to participate in UNFCCC processes and express their views and opinions. This letter presents the observer engagement activities undertaken during the year 2018, including in the lead up to and during the main climate conference of the year in 2018 (COP24).

Generally, throughout the year, following the successful engagement of the Fijian Presidency with the support of the Government of Germany during COP23 (2017), the Polish Presidency for 2018 and COP24 followed a similar path and extended their support for participation of NGOs at the Pre-COP (an event held before the COP) and COP24.

In particular, the following efforts were made by the Polish Presidency, supported by the secretariat, during the year:

1. The Polish Presidency organized meetings with the observers during the mid-year sessions in May 2018 (SB48) on various aspects in the lead up to the COP to be held in December 2018. One such meeting also included the UNFCCC Climate Champion (appointed by the relevant Presidency), who addressed the observers in this regard.
2. During that meeting, with the Polish Champion, clarity was sought on a law passed in Katowice, Poland (the location chosen to host the annual climate conference for 2018), that prevented unauthorized demonstrations. The Champion addressed the questions on all topics and provided more clarity on the law in question and made suggestions for facilitating peaceful demonstrations. The Polish Presidency also provided clarifications to questions from observers as a follow up and made the necessary arrangements to hold a large demonstration of climate conference observers and delegates in the city of Katowice on the side-lines of COP24 in December last year.
3. An additional session of the Subsidiary Bodies of UNFCCC was held in Bangkok, Thailand in August/September 2018. During that session, the Polish Presidency held meetings with



observers, where they listened to various views on topics of negotiations, discussed the plans for COP24 and answered several questions raised by observers.

4. The venue set-up for that Bangkok meeting also facilitated informal interactions between the observer participants and Parties as the common areas were located outside the plenaries and were shared by both observers and Parties.
5. The Presidency also met with observers at other opportunities that presented themselves, such as a meeting that was organized in New York during the UNGA, where both observers and the Presidency were present.
6. The Polish Presidency financially supported participation of several NGO representatives for the “pre-COP” meeting between the Presidency and the constituencies in October 2018. In addition, the Presidency organized a Non-Party Stakeholders day during the Pre-COP and organized a trip to the city of Katowice for observers to get a firsthand view of the preparation for COP24 and its venue.
7. In December 2018, the twenty-fourth Conference of the Parties (COP 24) was hosted in Katowice, Poland. Large scale observer engagement continued to be a significant feature of the conference, as in previous years. The UNFCCC secretariat successfully piloted a daily badge system that allowed observer organizations more flexibility in managing their participation, in particular observers could nominate additional delegates to attend COP24 for short periods during the COP within their assigned capacity meaning that overall, more individual observers were able to attend the COP.
8. Peaceful demonstrations were a popular mode of engagement by observers and 78 actions were facilitated within the venue during the 2 weeks of the conference.
9. A total number of 145 new organizations were admitted as observers by COP 24, taking the number of admitted observer organizations to 2,404. As indicated in the past update, based on feedback from stakeholders and to keep the side events program more focused, the number of official side events was reduced from approximately 500 at COP 23 to 289 at COP 24.
10. Most Party negotiation meetings were open to observers. Sufficiently big meeting rooms allowed the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to be facilitated with minimal or no additional ticketing for these negotiation meetings.
11. The practice of organizing an “Open Dialogue” between Parties and observer organizations was continued by the Polish Presidency. The engagement in this regard started a few weeks before the COP24.
12. In addition, five meetings between high-level officials, including one with the UN Secretary-General and one meeting with the UNFCCC Executive Secretary, were organized for observers.
13. During the two weeks of COP24 itself, the Presidency held and participated in several events engaging non-Party stakeholders, acknowledging the progress that non-Party stakeholders are



making through climate action. The Polish Ambassador [met with observers in two separate events to provide a more detailed update and answer negotiations related questions.

Overall, 2018 showed again the significance of observer participation in climate COPs and the significant engagement of the Presidency and secretariat. The scale of the COP24 conference confirms the continued interest from NGOs and IGOs to participate in the climate negotiations process. The secretariat issued more than 6,200 observer badges during the two weeks of the COP 24 conference and at the midyear sessions, 1400 joined the conference in June and approximately 400 in August/September.

Needless to say, there were some challenges. For the COP, the significant participation numbers, combined with the physical constraints of the COP venue at times posed certain logistical challenges such as finding space for observers to organize constituency meetings. The UNFCCC secretariat constantly strives to improve its processes and practices to facilitate better and more enhanced observer participation and hopes to address these room and space related challenges going forward.

In this regard, we would like to advise that during the mid -year sessions that start in two weeks, the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) of the UNFCCC, at its fiftieth session (SB50), under the SBI agenda item ‘Arrangements for intergovernmental meetings’, Parties will continue to discuss the engagement of observer organizations and other non-Party stakeholders in the UNFCCC process. The UNFCCC secretariat has actively engaged with NGO constituencies to hear their views and is planning to organize an additional meeting with constituency focal points in this regard prior to the start of the SB50 to help and enhance observer engagement during the session.

Yours sincerely

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