

European ECOFORUM – WECF, Anke Stock

Aarhus Convention: 24th Meeting of WGP: Statement under PPIF

Agenda Item 8 III: Promotion of the principles of the Convention in international forums 29 October 2020

Civil society is facing a push back as human rights, in particular women's rights, do. The trend materialises in States restricting public participation, inter alia, in international forums. This is exacerbated and facilitated by the pandemic situation which leads to almost most forums falling back to use virtual meetings.

Regarding the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) process: the process this year was organised totally online and according to statistics more people than ever were able to participate including civil society representatives. However, this is a delusion, since this is not the real participation that is needed to find its way into the decision-making processes making changes possible. Furthermore, the ECOSOC/HLPF review process was not open to stakeholder participation, so Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) could not participate in the negotiations of these meetings.

Regarding the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM): this process is currently also held virtually. Reported obstacles are poor internet access that hinders meaningful public participation. We are now looking at the preparation of the 5th session of the International Conference for Chemicals Management (ICCM5) where NGOs call for an integration of a similar programme which existed formerly - the so-called Quick Start Programme. This provided capacity-building and financial means to guarantee equal and independent participation of NGOs in a SAICM Beyond 2020 process.

Another issue of concern which I want to raise here and now even though it is not subject to the current situation. I have been notified by our network that NGOs are not allowed to be part of observers in regional meetings of the EU at the SAICM sessions. Apparently, the EU regional meetings are the only one not being open to NGOs. This is a clear disregard of the commitments under Art 3.7 of the Aarhus Convention. We call again on Aarhus Parties to implement and promote the Almaty Guidelines widely.