



Submission to the 24th Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention

Draft Financial Arrangements

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The following brief submission is made to support the *submission of the European ECO Forum which was coordinated by the Center for International Environmental Law with input by member organizations of the European ECO Forum.*

As Environmental Law Officer of the IEN, the national coalition of eNGOs in Ireland, I would like to make the following observations relating to consideration of draft financial arrangements under the Convention.

But first I wish to acknowledge and welcome the focus and contribution of the secretariat and all those parties and others involved in the work programme of the Convention. In particular I wish to acknowledge our appreciation for the work and dedication of the Compliance Committee and Secretariat. Without them the efficacy of the Convention in practical terms would be significantly compromised.

I would ask for your indulgence and forbearance on the informal and hasty submission made here, and ask for them to be considered appropriately in the context of the discussions of the Working Group.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had significant impact on our world and has in too many instances and ways impacted our societies and our economies negatively. Undoubtedly a focus will be needed in addressing these impacts and recovering and rebuilding. The direction of travel for that effort will hopefully be to build a more sustainable and resilient future. It will be imperative therefore in all the decisions on activities and development, on policy and regulation that the voice of the people at the centre of the Aarhus Convention and which it is purposed to protect are heard. However there is a very real danger that the understandable effort to stimulate our economies will compromise the three pillars of the convention. Indeed, we are already aware of the increased challenges to observing the obligations of the convention in the context of the restrictions around the control of the spread of the pandemic. Equally it has been an important stimulus to transition toward more effective filing of electronic information and use of the new ways of communicating. Vigilance on these developments, both the positive and negative ones will bring additional challenges for the community who support the implementation of the Convention.

While I am cognisant of the potential for Parties to consider the many demands on their finances at this time, I would urge them to see this as a fundamental part of how we support our collective recovery. I would urge the Parties to consider how important it is now, more than ever to support the work of the Secretariat and the Compliance Committee in their decisions on financing. This is essential if we are not to slip into unequal implementation and compliance across the Parties, and suffer wholly avoidable negative impacts across neighbouring parties. We must ensure the work of the Committee and Secretariat is supported through appropriate levels of resourcing. Perhaps also, but only if necessary there might be consideration also for the possibility of re-distribution from other elements of the work of task forces etc, which might be more cost-effectively executed remotely, without compromising their quality and contribution.

Therefore in considering the draft report on financing, I would urge the Parties to support the call for realistic estimations of what is necessary to support the work of the Convention, and to indeed call for these estimates to be generously considered in the light of:

- i. The additional work demands likely to arise consequent on the pandemic; and
- ii. The current evolved nature of the convention, which means there are now multiple demands on the secretariat and committee in particular in:
 - a. Following up on compliance matters
 - b. Implementation reports
 - c. Addressing new communications and the need to maintain coherence across its own and other relevant evolving jurisprudence
 - d. In supporting the understanding and influence of the Convention

I would also urge them to be prepared to respond generously and indeed proactively to those estimates, regardless of the financing structures proposed.

Additionally I would urge the Parties to consider generously supporting funding for independent team of NGOs to work with and assist potential communicants in the preparation and where appropriate presentation of their communications. The potential for this to be a particularly cost-effective mechanism in presenting clear and well-crafted communications could act to benefit the secretariat and Committee and of course the Parties themselves. It could serve to avoid over-heads associated with dealing with the learning curve of communicants and their potential lack of familiarity with the convention, and minimise the effort associated with dealing with invalid and/or inadmissible or poorly considered or drafted communications.

The work across all elements of the Convention and our future ambitions for enhanced implementation is compromised, if we are not vigilant of the foundational elements – namely compliance with what we have committed to and ratified.

Many thanks for your consideration of my submission, and I wish all the participants well in these challenging times.

Yours sincerely

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