

Aarhus Convention

Laying the groundwork for Mongolia to join the Aarhus convention



At the invitation of the Head of the Office of the President of Mongolia, UNECE organized a mission to Ulaanbaatar on 25 and 26 April 2012. The mission sought to encourage Mongolia to act on its interest in acceding to the Aarhus Convention, by promoting a better understanding of the benefits and opportunities offered by the Convention's framework. During high-level consultations, the President expressed his appreciation for the mission and demonstrated his keen interest to continue Mongolia's efforts to accede to the Convention. Statements, reaffirming strong support for the country's accession were also made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Minister of Nature, Environment and Tourism and the Head of the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia.



The mission was led by the Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention, and also counted representatives from Italy, Kazakhstan, Norway and Poland, who shared the experience of their countries in implementing the Aarhus Convention and provided useful advice on further steps and actions needed in ratifying and implementing it. The Chair underscored that, in the lead up to the Rio+20 Conference, Mongolia could "send an important message on the continuing relevance of Principle 10" and could "offer a reminder of the universal application of the principles of the Aarhus Convention", adding that "the endorsement of transparent, consensual, participatory decision-making demonstrates a commitment to build a stable and secure society, which in the long term can become economically prosperous and environmentally and socially sustainable".

The impact of the mining boom

The recent discovery of rich natural resources in Mongolia (uranium, coal and gold) has drawn the attention of large investors to the mining sector, thus raising public concern about health safety as well as environmental and social hazards from such activities. It was reported that most investors do not apply basic safety, social and environment standards and use technologies and equipment which are banned in the companies' own countries of origin. Abandoned toxic wastes and toxic dust are among the hazards that affect the most vulnerable groups such as babies and children. Furthermore, illegal cross-border trafficking of natural resources from Mongolia to neighbouring countries has been also reported. Due to enormous pressure from the population, the Government has suspended about 100 licences that have already been issued for mining activities; this has led to a number of court cases initiated by foreign investors against the Mongolian Government.

A series of multi-stakeholder and bilateral meetings held during the mission provided the opportunity to exchange views and information on emerging environmental and social-economic issues and concerns, such as environmental impact assessment in the mining sector, access to information related to permits and licences and access to justice and international dispute settlement. Some 100 participants were invited to the multi-stakeholder consultations, which also involved the Head of the Office of the President, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Minister of Nature Environment and Tourism, officers from ministries responsible for mining and urban development, the Head of the Human Rights Commission of Mongolia, advisers to the President, parliamentarians, civil society (including from rural areas throughout the country), the private sector, independent experts and international organizations. The consultations featured open debates on the matters related to access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters with a view to their role in mitigating health and environmental risks generated by the exploitation of Mongolia's natural resources.

Most Government officials and representatives of the Parliament and NGOs from the capital met during the mission supported accession to the Aarhus Convention, as they saw the empowerment of people as an important tool to protect the nature and the Convention as a tool for ensuring the sustainable development of Mongolia's economy.

As the consultations began, a representative of Mongolia's nomadic rural population noted: "the twenty-fifth of April is the day of Dragon. The Day of Dragon in the year of Dragon brings luck". Let's hope that the mission will help Mongolia to pursue its path towards sustainable future. □

Call for proposals: Good practices in policy-making on ageing - open until 30 May 2012

Preparations for the Ministerial Conference **Ensuring a society for all ages: Promoting quality of life and active ageing** on 19-20 September 2012 in Vienna, Austria, are in full swing.

During the conference, an exhibition will showcase good practice examples of ageing-related policy-making in the region. All member States are invited to submit proposals until 30 May 2012. □

For details, please visit:

http://www.unece.org/pau/ageing/ministerial_conference_2012.html.



Climate Neutral Cities: How to make cities less energy and carbon intensive and more resilient to climatic challenges

Cities and towns play a crucial role in the social and economic development of countries. Strong urban economies are indispensable for generating the resources needed for public and private investments in infrastructure, education, health, improved living conditions and, particularly, poverty alleviation.

In many UNECE member countries, cities are already leading the transition towards a green economy and low-carbon development. Due to their compact urban form and high population density, urban areas are natural testing grounds for achieving resource efficient and green economic growth.

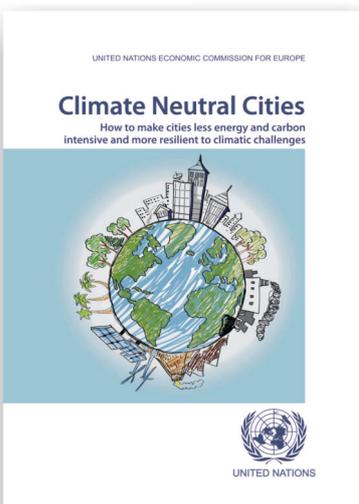
This report outlines a range of systemic interrelated measures for a progressive transformation towards low-energy, low-carbon, highly resilient and ultimately climate neutral cities. Its recommendations fall under four main headings, with coordination through a well-managed city-level framework being perhaps the most essential ingredient for success.

- **Waste management:**
Options and criteria for recycling, the production of biofuels and incineration.
- **Low-carbon mobility:**
Disincentives for using cars, along with the promotion of non-motorized and good public transport, and the introduction of alternative fuels infrastructure.
- **Urban energy infrastructure:**
Incentives to stimulate increased use of renewable energy, and promote energy-efficient technologies and intelligent electric grid systems for city facilities.
- **Urban form and green spaces:**
Techniques to reduce and prevent sprawl, while preserving and expanding green and open spaces, mitigating the urban heat island effect.

The report concludes by introducing a city roadmap for climate neutrality with guidelines for setting up an organizational framework and to developing priority actions. □

The publication is available at:

<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=29875>.



Committee on Trade to discuss export and import challenges in countries with transition

The Fifth session of the Committee on Trade will take place on 18-19 June 2012 at Palais des Nations.

The session will feature a joint High Level Segment with the International Trade Centre (ITC) on export and import challenges in countries with transition economies. A full afternoon will be dedicated to discussing the findings of the joint UNECE/ITC study on procedural and regulatory barriers to trade in Kazakhstan.

The session will also involve interactive discussions on Aid-for-Trade in the region, and on traceability, particularly its role in supporting efficient, safe and secure global supply chains.

Reflections on trade facilitation efforts in the UNECE region will be provided by Professor Lauri Ojala of the Turku School of Economics (Finland), who will be delivering the keynote speech.

The exchange of views and proposals emerging from the discussions will serve as a basis for the programme of work of the Committee on Trade and its subsidiary bodies that formulate recommendations on trade facilitation; standardization and technical regulation policies; and agricultural quality standards. □

For more information please visit:

<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=29210>.

