Welcoming remarks by Mr Marco Keiner
Director Environment Division
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is with great pleasure that I am addressing this thematic session on promoting the Aarhus Convention’s principles in international forums.

- I would like to extend a warm welcome to the representatives of all Parties and stakeholders who join us today and, in particular to the panelists from UNFCCC secretariat, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Investment Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Bankwatch and the European ECO Forum.

- I am particularly delighted to welcome today Mr Pierre-Henri Guignard, the General Secretary on the preparation and organization of the COP-21. And let’s me take this opportunity to thank France for its leadership and tremendous efforts it makes to further the principles of the Aarhus Convention in various international forums.

- 2015 has been important year for multilateralism – also in the field of environment. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development had been adopted with about half of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) having a direct focus on the environment. There is also at least one target on environmental sustainability in each SDG. In addition, the Paris Agreement constitutes an important framework for the international community to effectively tackle the causes and impacts of climate change over the coming years.

- Both instruments offer a great opportunity for governments to engage with different stakeholders - NGOs, business, academia and others – and to discuss challenges and exchange ideas on their practical implementation, specific measures and follow-up.

- For today’s thematic session on promoting the principles of the Aarhus Convention in international forums we take the time to look back and take stock of what has been achieved on topics you had addressed in previous meetings: These topics include the
High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development processes, UNEP’s access to information and stakeholder policy, the climate change-related decision-making and recent developments in international financial institutions.

- These thematic sessions of the Working Group play an important role as they provide a unique forum to share information, good practices and challenges in a number of different contexts. They also inspire countries and stakeholders to take commitments and follow up with the necessary actions.

- I would like to thank all those present for their strong commitment to supporting the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol in their own country and for the promotion of these unique treaties across the globe.