1. Introduction

Building on a process of broad multi-stakeholder consultations at national, regional and global levels, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in September 2015. The 2030 Agenda stipulates that its implementation, follow-up and review are to be guided by the principles of transparency and participation of all stakeholders and people.

In particular SDG 16, which focuses on non-violence and governance, is closely linked to the principles of the Aarhus Convention. It includes targets on developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels (16.6); ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (16.7); and ensuring public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements (16.10).

While the first steps to implement the SDGs are mainly taken at the national level, international forums are focusing on building effective mechanisms to follow up on and review the SDGs. This is in line with the call of the 2030 Agenda for strong follow-up and review mechanisms at national, regional and global levels, which will be open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people.

2. High-level Political Forum (HLPF)

At the global level, the High-level Political Forum is the central platform for SDG follow-up and review. Convened for the fourth time and for the first time after the adoption of the SDGs, the next meeting will take place from 11-20 July 2016 in New York. In line with the long-standing practice of the post-Rio sustainable development process, the HLPF provides for an inclusive and participatory format.

All people can participate in the HLPF through the Major Groups and other Stakeholders approach. The HLPF modalities include a number of provisions that define the engagement of Major Groups and other Stakeholders in the meetings. Representatives of the Major Groups and other relevant stakeholders are allowed to attend all official meetings of the HLPF; to have access to all official information and documents; to intervene in official meetings; to submit documents and present written and oral contributions; to make recommendations; and to organize side events and round tables, in cooperation with Member States and the Secretariat.

1 See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16
2 For first steps taken by governments in the UNECE region, see Regional SDG Survey at: http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=42256
3 See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf
4 See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups
5 General Assembly resolutions 67/290, in particular paragraph 15, and 70/1.
For the 2016 HLPF, a number of position papers has been submitted by stakeholders. Stakeholders will also have the possibility to submit a written report on their own contribution to SDG implementation. Stakeholder participation at the HLPF has been increasing; currently there are around 900 registrations from Major Groups and other Stakeholders for the 2016 HLPF.

It is recognized that the nine Major Groups, identified in Agenda 21 in 1992, have provided a structure for coordination, dissemination of information and communication among stakeholders and with their partners. The inclusion of other relevant stakeholders in the work of the HLPF in addition to the Major Groups allows for the strengthened participation of additional groups, such as persons with disabilities, older persons, migrants or volunteer groups. At the same time, some Major Group representatives have expressed the view that the inclusion of other stakeholders outside previously existing coordination structures has posed challenges to the coherence of stakeholder participation. To facilitate coordination among Major Groups and other Stakeholders, an HLPF Coordination Mechanism has been established.

3. Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (RFSD)

The General Assembly has invited the UN Regional Commissions to contribute to the work of the High-level Political Forum, including through annual regional meetings, the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development.

Taking into account the ongoing global negotiations on the overall follow-up and review architecture for the 2030 Agenda, UNECE member States engaged in a series of informal consultations to determine the modalities of the 2016 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. As an ad-hoc arrangement for this year, it was decided to hold the Regional Forum as a half-day special informal segment of the UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM) in the morning of 10 May 2016.

Supported by a number of member States, organizational arrangements were defined to ensure the involvement of non-state actors in the Regional Forum. A morning meeting of the moderator of the Regional Forum, Ambassador Jan Kara, Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic, with non-state actors took place before the Regional Forum and was also attended by interested government delegations. The key messages from the pre-meeting were relayed to the Regional Forum by the moderator.

Facilitated by one of the Organizing Partners of the Major Group NGOs, a civil society position paper was prepared for the Regional Forum. In addition, a speaker from civil society shared their views on a possible future regional follow-up and review mechanisms for the SDGs. A statement was also received from the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) on the potential of the business sector to contribute to SDG achievement.

Following the Regional Forum, informal consultations among member States on a regional mechanism for follow-up and review will continue with a view to taking a decision at the next session of the UNECE in April 2017, with many member States supporting a participatory and inclusive multi-stakeholder format.

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7 For further information on the Regional Forum and its conclusions, see http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=42919#/