

## Written Statement of UNEP for the thematic session on promoting the principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Fora

21th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (4-6 April 2017)

Prepared by UN Environment, March 20, 2017

### 1. Status of UNEP's Access-to-Information Policy

The Governing Council of UN Environment, at its twenty-seventh and first universal session held in February 2013, decided in Paragraph 17 of decision 27/2 to enhance transparency and openness in its work, and in this regard requested the UNEP Executive Director to establish a written Access-to-Information Policy.

On January 28, 2016, the Executive Director of UN Environment established the new policy, as a result of an in-depth, participatory process.

The text of the policy can be found under: <https://goo.gl/y5tUhc>

Subsequently to the establishment of the policy, UN Environment developed *standard operating procedures* to the policy that further specify the application of the policy and in-house responsibilities.

For the purpose of requesting information from UN Environment, an Access-to-Information Desk was established.

Post Office Mail:	Access-to-Information Desk United Nations Environment Programme Address: P.O. Box 30552, Nairobi 00100, Kenya
Phone:	+254 20 7621234
Email:	<a href="mailto:unepinfo@unep.org">unepinfo@unep.org</a>

The number of requests received through this desk since it was established has been rather modest.

### 2. Stakeholder Engagement Policy

In response to "The Future We Want" (Paragraph 88h) and decision 27/2 of UN Environment's Governing Council at its first universal session in February 2013, UN Environment had put in place a process of developing a new Stakeholder Engagement Policy, for endorsement by the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA). Unfortunately, no conclusion was reached by member states so far, neither during the 2014, nor the 2016 session of the Environment Assembly.

During the ongoing preparatory process for the 2017 Assembly that will take place in December in Nairobi, Member States decided, not to table a new draft of the policy, given that there is no indication that a new draft would have more chance to be agreed upon than previous drafts. Consequently, a new version of the Stakeholder Engagement Policy is earliest expected for the 2019 session of the Environment Assembly. In the meantime, under the leadership of the President of the UN Environment Assembly, Governments will continue informal discussions, including also civil society.

Until a new UN Environment Stakeholder Engagement Policy is in place, UN Environment will continue to apply its current rules and practices for Stakeholder Engagement, as captured in UN Environment's Stakeholder Engagement Handbook (<https://goo.gl/YqRHYG>). These are widely regarded as already being very open, transparent and participatory.

In the daily application of the current rules and practices for stakeholder engagement, UN Environment faces the problem that existing opportunities for participation and engagement are rarely used by civil society actors, who seem to mainly focus on major meetings such as the Environment Assembly. For instance, draft working documents of UN Environment's Committee of Permanent Representatives are shared with Major Groups for input, at the same time when Member States receive these documents. Still, response and input from Major Groups on these documents remain extremely rare. The situation regarding the engagement of Major Groups in physical meetings of the Committee of Permanent Representative is similar. While participation, including the right for interventions, is open for representatives of accredited organizations – also remotely via inter-active teleconference – substantive input remains an exception and is often focused on procedural issues.

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