



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
10 April 2019

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

Twenty-third meeting

Geneva, 26–28 June 2019

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

**Implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021,
including financial matters**

Report on the implementation of the work programme for 2018–2021

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present report was prepared pursuant to the decision of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters at its sixth session (Budva, Montenegro, 11–14 September 2017) (see ECE/MP.PP/2017/2/Add.1, decision VI/5, annex I, item X). It provides an overview of the implementation of the work programme for the Convention for 2018–2021 for the period 1 January 2018 to 1 April 2019.



Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	3
I. Substantive issues.....	3
A. Access to information, including electronic information tools, the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy and PRTR.net	3
B. Public participation in decision-making	4
C. Access to justice	5
D. Genetically modified organisms	6
II. Procedures and mechanisms.....	6
A. Compliance mechanism.....	6
B. Capacity-building activities	7
C. Reporting mechanism	8
III. Promotional activities.....	8
A. Awareness-raising regarding and promotion of the Convention and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers.....	8
B. Promotion of the Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums and other interlinkages with relevant international bodies and processes	9
C. Coordination and oversight of intersessional activities	11

Introduction

1. The present report provides an overview of the implementation of the work programme for the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) for 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PP/2017/2/Add.1, decision VI/5, annex I) for the period 1 January 2018 to 1 April 2019, focusing on operational and organizational aspects. Owing to the cross-cutting nature of the Convention, implementation of different work programme areas contributed to furthering the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals across the whole 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 16. An overview of contributions and expenditures in relation to the implementation of the work programme is provided in document ECE/MP.PP/WG.1/2019/6. Only some of the activities related to access to information, capacity-building and awareness-raising regarding the Convention's Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers are included; a comprehensive report on the implementation of the work programmes of the Protocol for 2015–2017 and 2018–2021 (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2018/3) was submitted to the sixth meeting of the Protocol's Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 9 November 2018).

2. In implementing the work programme, the secretariat made strenuous efforts to avoid duplication of work and the inefficient use of resources by pursuing synergies with activities under other United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) multilateral environmental agreements, United Nations agencies and other partners. This required spending more time on the preparatory phase of activities to ensure proper consultations with the chairs of the respective subsidiary bodies and partner organizations. Furthermore, the secretariat extended, and will continue to extend, the use of electronic tools (for example, email consultations, conferencing by means of web-based, video or telephone technology, online databases and the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy), with a view to rendering its activities more resource- and time-efficient.

I. Substantive issues

A. Access to information, including electronic information tools, the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy and PRTR.net

3. During the reporting period (i.e. 1 January 2018–1 April 2019), activities had primarily focused on promoting the exchange of experience to improve public access to environmental information, as required by articles 4 and 5 and other relevant provisions of the Aarhus Convention, including through electronic information tools. Those activities contributed to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), and in particular target 16.10 (public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms) together with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (health), Sustainable Development Goal 6 (water) and Sustainable Development Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production).

4. On the margins of the twenty-second meeting of the Working Group of the Parties (Geneva, 19–21 June 2018), a thematic session on access to information took stock of developments with regard to several subjects, including: (a) the benefits of providing public access to environmental information and the challenges encountered; (b) the scope of environmental information; (c) the providers of information; (d) exceptions to the provision of information and grounds for refusal; (e) the format of the information to be provided and timeliness; and (f) dissemination of real-time, up-to-date, accurate and functional environmental information in forms and formats meeting the needs of different users. The session also addressed a number of other issues included in decision VI/1 on promoting effective access to information, adopted at the sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties (ECE/MP.PP/2017/2/Add.1).

5. Pursuant to decision VI/1 of the Meeting of the Parties, the secretariat began preparatory work regarding the organization of the sixth meeting of the Task Force on Access to Information, back-to-back with a workshop on modernizing environmental information

systems to facilitate effective dissemination of environmental information, to be held in Geneva, from 2 to 4 October 2019, and the updating of the recommendations on electronic information tools set out in decision II/3.

6. The secretariat continued to manage the Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy¹ and the PRTR.net² global portal. The online tools were currently being updated, both in terms of security, functionality and content. The two portals were used to facilitate the collection, dissemination and exchange of information related to national implementation of the Convention and relevant global and regional developments regarding implementation of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. They also provided information regarding pollutant release and transfer registers. Parties were encouraged to continue uploading relevant news articles and resources and to provide the weblink to their national node.

7. The secretariat also continued to maintain and populate a jurisprudence database accessible through the Convention's web page and the updated interface of the Aarhus Clearinghouse, which enhanced its search capabilities. The database promoted the exchange of jurisprudence concerning the Convention and facilitated work on access to justice. It included decisions issued by courts of law or other bodies that made reference to the Convention or its principles, as well as summaries (some of which were in English, while others were in Russian) and decisions in the original language and in English, when available. To date, there were more than 120 cases in the database, the maintenance of which was an ongoing activity.

8. The secretariat had gathered a collection of case studies on electronic information tools, which it had posted on a dedicated web page and updated regularly.³ A call for case studies was ongoing, with a view to the continued population of the collection.

9. The secretariat had also begun upgrading the online reporting tools and databases of national implementation reports for the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol and integrating the Aarhus Good Practice online database⁴ into the Aarhus Clearinghouse in order to align those websites with the latest information technology security standards.

10. During the reporting period, the secretariat had contributed to the work of other international forums or expert meetings organized by partner organizations dealing with access to environmental information and electronic information tools. For instance, it had provided a number of inputs related to the World Summit on the Information Society, the development of a shared environmental information system across the region, national environmental information systems and the integration of environmental information into e-government and open data frameworks.

B. Public participation in decision-making

11. During the reporting period, activities had focused on promoting effective public participation in decision-making, as required by articles 6, 7 and 8 and other relevant provisions of the Aarhus Convention. Those activities had contributed to furthering Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), and in particular target 16.7 (responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels) and target 16.10 (protection of fundamental freedoms) together with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (health) and Sustainable Development Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production).

12. At its eighth meeting (Geneva, 8 and 9 October 2018), the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making had provided a platform for discussing issues of a systemic nature on ensuring effective public participation, namely: (a) meaningful and early public

¹ See <http://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/>.

² See www.prtr.net/.

³ See www.unece.org/env/pp/aarhus/tfai/case_studies.html.

⁴ See https://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/resources-keyword?individual=1&field_keywords_target_id=good%20practice.

participation; (b) the availability of all relevant documents to the public; (c) effective notification and time frames for public participation; and (d) ensuring that greater account was taken of the comments from the public in the final decisions, and ensuring the appropriate provision of feedback on how the public's comments had been taken into account in the decisions. The Task Force had also discussed issues related to the protection of persons exercising their rights in conformity with the provisions of the Convention and had held a thematic session on product-related decision-making and chemicals. In addition, the meeting had provided an opportunity to share experiences on the use of the Maastricht Recommendations on Promoting Effective Public Participation in Decision-making in Environmental Matters.⁵

13. A call for case studies on public participation in environmental decision-making was ongoing, with a view to the continued population of the Aarhus Clearinghouse Good Practice online database.

C. Access to justice

14. During the reporting period, numerous activities had focused on promoting effective access to justice, thereby contributing to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), in particular target 16.3 (rule of law at the national and international levels and equal access to justice for all) and target 16.10 (public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms).

15. At its eleventh meeting (Geneva, 27 and 28 February 2018), the Task Force on Access to Justice had provided a platform for exchanging information on key recent developments concerning legislation, policy and case law with regard to the implementation of the third pillar of the Convention and possible measures to remove barriers hampering its implementation. The thematic session of the meeting had focused on promoting effective access to justice in cases on the right to environmental information. In addition, delegates had discussed new developments related to the implementation of the third pillar of the Convention in general terms. The participants had also examined tools to promote effective access to justice, including e-justice initiatives and initiatives promoting capacity-building and cooperation. The meeting had been preceded by a special session for representatives of the judiciary, judicial training institutions and other review bodies.⁶

16. Following the outcomes of the above meeting to launch a survey on access to justice in cases on the right to environmental information, the secretariat, in consultation with the Chair, had finalized a questionnaire taking into account comments received, circulated it to the suggested respondents in 12 targeted Parties and collected the provided input.

17. At its twelfth meeting (Geneva, 28 February and 1 March 2019),⁷ the Task Force had focused its thematic session on access to justice in cases relating to air quality. In addition, delegates had continued the discussion on measures to promote effective access to justice in cases on the right to environmental information, based on the preliminary findings of the survey launched at the previous meeting. Delegates had also shared information on other new developments related to the implementation of the third pillar of the Convention and examined tools to promote effective access to justice.

18. Pursuant to decision VI/3 of the Meeting of the Parties, the Judicial Colloquium entitled "SDG16: Role of Judiciary in Promoting the Rule of Law in Environmental Matters" had been held in Geneva, on 27 and 28 February 2019.⁸ The Judicial Colloquium had been organized by the secretariat in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the International Union for Conservation of Nature World Commission on Environmental Law, the Global Judicial Institute on the

⁵ See www.unece.org/index.php?id=49142.

⁶ See www.unece.org/index.php?id=47184.

⁷ See www.unece.org/index.php?id=50570.

⁸ See www.unece.org/index.php?id=50741.

Environment, the European Union Forum of Judges for the Environment and the Association of European Administrative Judges. The event had gathered representatives of the judiciary, judicial training institutions and other review bodies. The objective of the Colloquium had been to strengthen the capacity of the judiciary to effectively handle cases related to environmental matters and to apply constitutionally entrenched environmental rights. The meeting had addressed the role of the Aarhus Convention in that context and the linkages between the Aarhus Convention and other ECE multilateral environmental agreements in enforcing environmental law and the concept of environmental constitutionalism.

19. A call for case summaries related to the Convention was ongoing, with a view to the continued population of the jurisprudence database.

D. Genetically modified organisms

20. Bilateral collaboration on genetically modified organisms was ongoing between the secretariats of the Aarhus Convention and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The two secretariats had begun preparatory work regarding the organization of a global round table on genetically modified organisms, to be held from 16 to 18 December 2019, in Geneva.

21. During the reporting period, no new Party had ratified the amendment on genetically modified organisms. Two more Parties from among the following list must ratify the amendment for it to enter into force: Albania; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Belarus; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; North Macedonia; Tajikistan; Turkmenistan; and Ukraine. The Parties whose ratification of the amendment on genetically modified organisms would count towards its entry into force had been repeatedly called upon during the previous intersessional period to take specific steps towards ratification and to provide the secretariat with a written explanation of the status of ratification. At its sixth session, the Meeting of the Parties had requested the Working Group of the Parties to continue monitoring closely progress towards the entry into force of the amendment on genetically modified organisms (see ECE/MP.PP/2017/2).

II. Procedures and mechanisms

A. Compliance mechanism

22. During the reporting period, the Compliance Committee had held four regular meetings, namely, its sixtieth to sixty-third meetings, and ten virtual meetings. Three regular meetings and seven virtual meetings had taken place in 2018, and one regular meeting and three virtual meetings had been held in the first quarter of 2019. Between 1 January 2018 and 1 April 2019, 16 new communications had been forwarded to the Committee for consideration as to their preliminary admissibility.⁹ The Committee had determined 11 of those communications to be admissible on a preliminary basis, 3 communications to be inadmissible and had deferred its determination of preliminary admissibility on 2 communications. No submissions had been made to the Committee by Parties during the reporting period and the secretariat had not made any referrals. As at 1 April 2019, the Committee had 52 cases pending, consisting of 51 communications (2 pending determination of preliminary admissibility) and 1 submission.

23. In addition to the above-mentioned 52 cases, the Committee was following up on 10 decisions adopted by the Meeting of the Parties at its sixth session on the compliance of individual Parties, namely decisions VI/8a–e and VI/8g–k, concerning, respectively, Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, Czechia, Kazakhstan, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Committee was also following

⁹ For details, see the reports of the Compliance Committee, available at www.unece.org/env/pp/ccMeetings.html.

up on two requests from the Meeting of the Parties concerning the European Union and Turkmenistan.¹⁰ After taking into account the first progress reports by the Parties concerned, due on 1 October 2018, and the comments from communicants and observers thereon, the Committee, in late February 2019, had adopted and sent to the Parties concerned, communicants and observers, the Committee's first reviews of the progress made by each Party concerned in implementing the decision or request of the Meeting of the Parties regarding that Party's compliance. Thereafter, at its sixty-third meeting (Geneva, 11–15 March 2019) the Committee had held audio conferences in open session with representatives of the Parties concerned and observers, in order to discuss the Committee's first progress reviews. The audio conferences had also provided Parties and observers with an opportunity to ask any questions they might have regarding the Committee's follow-up procedure and what might be required to fully implement the decision or request concerning their compliance.

24. During the reporting period, the Compliance Committee had continued its work on revising the Guide to the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee, completing and adopting the revised Guide at its sixty-third meeting. The revised Guide had been prepared in a transparent and participatory manner, with all discussions of the draft revised guide taking place in open session at Committee meetings and all drafts being published on the Committee's website in advance of the discussions. In addition to the discussions in open session at the Committee meetings, Parties and observers had been given the opportunity to send written comments on the various drafts.

25. An informal network of chairs of the compliance and implementation bodies under the ECE multilateral environmental agreements had been established in the spring of 2012, on the initiative of the Chair of the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee. The aim of the network was to exchange information and lessons learned on the work of the bodies and to share views on how to improve implementation and compliance mechanisms. It had been proposed that the fifth meeting of the informal network be held in 2020.¹¹

B. Capacity-building activities

26. In addition to capacity-building activities mentioned under other areas of work to build synergies and enhance coordination with partners, the secretariat had continuously maintained close cooperation with and provided advisory support to United Nations partner agencies and other international organizations within the Aarhus Convention capacity-building coordination framework.¹²

27. Detailed information on capacity-building activities, including current trends and considerations, was available in the report on capacity-building (ECE/MP.PP/2017/7) and its accompanying (informal) document (AC/MOP-6/Inf.2), which had been submitted to the Meeting of the Parties for consideration at its sixth session.

28. A networking event for matching countries' needs with offers of support had been held on 20 June 2018, on the margins of the twenty-second meeting of the Working Group of the Parties. The event had featured a discussion in break-out groups (three rounds) facilitated by the partner organizations on the following topics in the context of the Aarhus Convention: (a) access to information; (b) public participation; (c) access to justice; and (d) e-learning and education.¹³

29. The secretariat had promoted the Convention at the annual meeting of the Aarhus Centres, organized by OSCE (Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan, 19 and 20 September 2018). The

¹⁰ Request ACCC/M/2017/2 (Turkmenistan) (see ECE/MP.PP/2017/2/Add.1, decision VI/8, para. 19) and request ACCC/M/2017/3 (European Union) (see ECE/MP.PP/2017/2, para. 63).

¹¹ Further information regarding the joint work and informal networks of ECE multilateral environmental agreements is available at www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/joint-work-and-informal-networks.html.

¹² Meeting documents and other information on this work area are available at www.unece.org/env/pp/oa.html.

¹³ More information is available from www.unece.org/index.php?id=50570.

meeting had focused on the role of Aarhus Centres in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and on ways to ensure their sustainable functioning.

30. The eleventh meeting of the Capacity-building Coordination Framework had been held in Geneva, on 9 October 2018, back-to-back with the eighth meeting of the Task Force on Public Participation in Decision-making (Geneva, 8 and 9 October 2018). The meeting had focused on discussing potential cooperation within existing and future capacity-building activities under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers in the light of the decisions of the Meetings of the Parties to the Convention and the Protocol adopted at the most recent sessions (Budva, Montenegro, 11–15 September 2017) and considering the upcoming 2019 in-depth review of progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 16.

31. The secretariat had also provided substantive support to a multi-stakeholder dialogue entitled “Hard Talk: New Possibilities for Developing Renewable Energy Sustainably in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, held in Sarajevo, on 4 and 5 December 2018, and to another such dialogue entitled “New Possibilities for Developing Renewable Energy Sustainably in Serbia”, held in Belgrade, on 21 and 22 March 2019.

32. The secretariat had promoted the relevant obligations under the Convention at the Regional meeting on open data and e-government for the environment.¹⁴ The aim of the Regional meeting had been to build the capacities of the authorities of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The event had been organized by the European Environment Agency as a part of a European Union-funded project entitled “Towards a Shared Environmental Information System in the European Neighborhood”. The meeting was held in Kyiv on 5–6 March 2019 at the invitation by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine.

33. In addition, the secretariat was liaising continuously with partner organizations, potential donors and interested countries and stakeholders and was handling a number of consultations regarding capacity-building activities through electronic means and providing advisory support as required.

34. The Aarhus Clearinghouse was increasingly being used to disseminate information about funding opportunities, workshops and training events relevant to building capacities regarding the implementation of the Aarhus Convention.

C. Reporting mechanism

35. The Meeting of the Parties had set 1 November 2017 as the later deadline for submission of the national implementation reports for the 2017 reporting cycle. To date, only Armenia and the Republic of Moldova had failed to submit their national implementation report for the 2017 reporting cycle.

III. Promotional activities

A. Awareness-raising regarding and promotion of the Convention and the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers

36. The secretariat, or relevant experts invited by the secretariat to do so, had participated in conferences, seminars, workshops and other events in various countries to promote and raise awareness regarding the Convention and its Protocol at the international level.

¹⁴ More information is available from <https://eni-seis.eionet.europa.eu/east/areas-of-work/communication/events/project-related-events/regional-event-on-open-data-and-e-government-for-environment-in-the-eni-east-countries>.

37. The secretariat had provided input regarding the Convention and its Protocol to the sixth Global Environment Outlook¹⁵ and its derivatives submitted to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fourth session (Nairobi, 11–15 March 2019). In addition, the secretariat had promoted synergy within the Multilateral Environment Agreement Information and Knowledge Management initiative coordinated by UNEP and had taken part in relevant meetings.

38. In 2018, the secretariat had also provided the substantive input on the Convention and its Protocol for the third cycle of environmental performance reviews of Kazakhstan and North Macedonia.¹⁶

39. The secretariat had provided substantive support to a training programme on public participation and strategic environmental assessments for Chinese investors and policymakers from Central Asia, in the context of the “International Coalition for Green Development on the Belt and Road” (Turin, Italy, 8–12 October 2018). The training programme had been jointly organized by UNEP and the International Labour Organization International Training Centre.

40. A promotional brochure entitled *Protecting your environment: The power is in your hands*, addressing the general public interested in the Convention and its provisions, had been published in all six official languages of the United Nations — Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish — and widely distributed.¹⁷ A Japanese-language translation was currently being prepared by the non-governmental organization (NGO) Aarhus Net Japan.

41. The secretariat had also promoted the Convention and the Protocol through various reports and articles prepared under the auspices of ECE and partner organizations. In addition, the secretariat continued to carry out an enhanced outreach exercise, distributing materials about the Convention and the Protocol to national focal points, Aarhus Centres, other United Nations bodies, international organizations, NGOs and academic institutions in the ECE region and beyond.

42. Following a formal expression of interest by Guinea Bissau, the secretariat continued to provide advisory support to the country in its efforts to accede to the Convention.

B. Promotion of the Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums and other interlinkages with relevant international bodies and processes

43. As to the implementation of the Almaty Guidelines on Promoting the Application of the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Forums, at its twenty-second meeting, the Working Group of the Parties had held a thematic session focused primarily on promoting the application of the Convention’s principles in international decision-making on chemicals and waste under the three UNEP chemical conventions,¹⁸ the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management policy framework. Participants in the thematic session had also reviewed progress in promoting the principles of the Convention within the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development processes and with regard to access to information and stakeholder engagement within the framework of the United Nations Environment Assembly and international financial institutions-related processes.

¹⁵ See www.unenvironment.org/global-environment-outlook/why-global-environment-outlook-matters/global.

¹⁶ See www.unece.org/index.php?id=50063.

¹⁷ See www.unece.org/index.php?id=35452.

¹⁸ The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.

44. During the reporting period, the secretariat had continued to support efforts to promote the Convention and its principles and interlinkages with various international forums, working with other United Nations bodies (in particular, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNEP, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals), other environmental treaty bodies (such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the Minamata Convention on Mercury, the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accident and the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context) and other international organizations (for example, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, OSCE and the World Bank Group).

45. The secretariat had also promoted the principles of the Aarhus Convention at a side event hosted by France and Costa Rica at the twenty-fourth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (Katowice, Poland, 2–14 December 2018). The secretariat had also promoted the principles of the Convention at similar side events held during meetings of the subsidiary bodies of the UNFCCC in April and June 2018, in preparation for the twenty-fourth session of the Conference of the Parties. Further, the secretariat had promoted the Convention and its principles at a side event entitled “Promoting sustainable and resilient societies through the effective application of Principle 10”, organized by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in collaboration with Chile, Costa Rica, France, Italy, ECE, UNEP and The Access Initiative.

46. During the thirty-seventh session of the Human Rights Council (Geneva, 26 February – 23 March 2018), the secretariat had promoted the Aarhus Convention on several occasions: (a) on 2 March 2018, at a side event regarding children’s rights and the environment, organized by the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment; (b) on 5 March 2018, during the plenary discussion on the promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development; (c) on 5 March 2018, at a side event organized by the NGOs Earthjustice and the Centre for International Environmental Law on the protection of environmental human rights defenders; (d) on 6 March 2018, at the launch of the United Nations Environmental Rights Initiative.

47. In response to a call by the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, in October 2018, the secretariat had provided input¹⁹ to the Special Rapporteur’s report on human rights obligations in the context of air pollution.²⁰

48. In response to a call for comments by the open-ended intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights,²¹ in March 2019, the secretariat had prepared and submitted comments on the zero draft of a legally binding instrument regulating, in international human rights law, the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises. The open-ended intergovernmental working group had been established through Human Rights Council resolution 26/9,²² adopted at the twenty-sixth session of the Human Rights Council, in June 2014.

49. Following a call for comments by EBRD, in March 2019, the secretariat had prepared and submitted comments on the EBRD draft revised Public Information Policy.²³

¹⁹ Further information is available at www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Environment/SREnvironment/Pages/AirPollution.aspx.

²⁰ A/HRC/40/55.

²¹ A/HRC/40/48, para. 91 (a).

²² A/HRC/RES/26/9.

²³ See www.ebrd.com/strategies-and-policies/have-your-say.html.

50. The secretariat had further promoted the Aarhus Convention at the first meeting of the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries, organized by the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (Geneva, 29 and 30 January 2018).

51. The secretariat had also promoted the Convention at an event entitled “Strengthening the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements: Can NGOs make a difference through compliance mechanisms?” (Geneva, 7 March 2018), organized jointly by the Implementation Committee under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and the Compliance Committee under the Protocol on Water and Health.

52. During the reporting period, upon request, the secretariat had also provided ongoing advisory support, including by engaging relevant experts, to ECLAC regarding the negotiation of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean.

53. The secretariat had organized a round table on the environmental dimension of Sustainable Development Goal 16, held on the margins of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (Geneva, 21 and 22 March 2019). The round table had been organized in cooperation with UNEP, the International Telecommunication Union and the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe.

54. In addition, the Aarhus Convention secretariat had continued to provide advice to various academic bodies, NGOs and other stakeholders upon request.

55. The Aarhus Clearinghouse was being increasingly used to disseminate information about public consultations and other relevant information under various international processes and forums.

C. Coordination and oversight of intersessional activities

56. During the reporting period, the status of the Convention and its amendment on genetically modified organisms with regard to accession, ratification or approval had remained unchanged. As at 1 February 2018, there were 47 Parties to the Convention and 31 Parties to the amendment on genetically modified organisms. The ratification of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers by Montenegro, on 11 October 2017, had raised the number of Parties to that instrument to 36.

57. Coordination and oversight of intersessional activities during the reporting period had been conducted by the Working Group of the Parties and its Bureau during regular meetings of those bodies.

58. The Bureau had held its forty-first meeting in Geneva, on 22 February 2018, its forty-second meeting in Geneva, on 21 June 2018, and its forty-third meeting in Geneva, on 26 February 2019. The Bureau had also held regular electronic consultations on different subjects.

59. Representatives of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy and the governing bodies of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements had continued to liaise at informal meetings; exchanging information on priorities under the agreements and identifying and discussing possible areas of cooperation and synergy in the light of recent and future key developments in the area of the environment. Along with members of the secretariat, the Chair of the Aarhus Convention and the Chair of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers had participated in the ninth, and most recent, such informal meeting (Geneva, 28 January 2019),²⁴ held back-to-back with the twenty-fourth session of the Committee on Environmental Policy (Geneva, 29–31 January 2019), in which the Chair of the Aarhus Convention had also participated, via audio link.

²⁴ The Chair’s summary of the ninth informal meeting between representatives of the governing bodies of the ECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements and the Committee of Environmental Policy is available at www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/joint-work-and-informal-networks.html.

60. At the twenty-fourth session of the Committee on Environmental Policy, the above-mentioned Chairs had delivered presentations on how the Convention and its Protocol supported Governments in their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on the main achievements, lessons learned and challenges, and further steps in supporting countries. Owing to their cross-cutting nature, the Convention and the Protocol played a role in the achievement of virtually all of the Sustainable Development Goals, such as ending poverty (Goal 1); health protection (Goal 3); water and sanitation management (Goal 6); clean energy (Goal 7); green economy (Goals 8, 9 and 12); the reduction of inequalities (Goal 10); sustainable consumption and production (Goal 12); climate action (Goal 13); tourism (Goals 8, 12, 14 and 15); and urban planning (Goals 11 and 13). In particular, the work under the Convention has helped Governments to achieve peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16) and improve health- and wellbeing- related decision-making (Goal 3). That progress had been made possible by promoting the following: effective, accountable and transparent governance; effective access to information; effective and inclusive public participation and transparency in national and international decision-making; and effective and equal access to justice for all.²⁵

²⁵ For more information, including texts of the presentations, see the web page for the twenty-fourth session. Available at www.unece.org/index.php?id=50063.