Written Statement of UN Environment for the Thematic Session on Promoting the Principles of the Aarhus Convention in International Fora

23th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (27 June 2019)

Prepared by UN Environment, May 27, 2019

1. Status of UN Environment’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 (see: https://bit.ly/2HRS7Zi).

The number of requests received through this desk since it was established remains to be rather modest. A reason for this is that most information held by UN Environment is accessible during the organization’s website.

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 2 United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA). No conclusion was reached by member states so far, neither during the 2014, nor the 2016 session of the Environment Assembly. During the third and fourth sessions of the Assembly, held in 2017 and 2019, no new text of the policy was tabled.

While a new Stakeholder Engagement Policy was not formally agreed upon by Member States or adopted by the Executive Director, the United Nations Environment Programme has made significant efforts to reflect in its day to day relationships with Major Groups the spirit of the Rio +20 outcome document and those elements of the draft stakeholder engagement policy that Member States agreed upon during the discussions on a new Stakeholder Engagement Policy.

A revised version of UN Environment’s Stakeholder Engagement Handbook that describes the latest practices of Stakeholder Engagement at UNEP is available here: https://bit.ly/2JqMtww
Furthermore, the United Nations Environment Programme continues to have a dedicated unit (Civil Society Unit) within its Governance Affairs Office to facilitate the engagement of Major Groups and Stakeholders, including by providing financial support to participate in meetings and events (see: http://web.unep.org/about/majorgroups/).

The United Nations Environment Programme continues to have a Private Sector Unit within its Governance Affairs Office to enhance the relationship of the organization with the private sector. Currently the development of a private sector engagement strategy is on the way.

In the daily application of the current rules and practices for stakeholder engagement, UN Environment still faces the problem that existing opportunities for participation and engagement are not fully utilized 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 the exception.

Overall it can be stated that the United Nations Environment Programme currently has all mechanisms in place that represent a modern, open, transparent and participatory approach towards engagement of Major Groups and Stakeholders, reflecting best practices in multi-lateral institutions. Thus, it can be stated that UN Environment has implemented the Paragraph 88h of the Rio + 20 outcome document to the furthest extent possible.

For the fourth session of the UN Environment Assembly in 2019, the Executive Director presented a detailed report on” Implementation of paragraph 88 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled “The future we want” (UNEP/EA.4/16) that can be found here: https://bit.ly/2Wvz0xw

This report gives in its chapter H a detailed overview about the implementation of Paragraph 88h of “The Future We Want”.

2
3. Participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders in the United Nations Environment Assembly

Participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders on the United Nations Environment Assembly is governed by Rule 70 of the Rules of Procedures of the United Nations Environment Assembly which is operationalized by UN Environment’s Stakeholder Engagement Handbook (see above).

The fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, held in March 2019, saw the record participation of over 1000 representatives of Major Groups and Stakeholders, even though UN Environment was only able to provide financial support for travel for 50 individuals.

A special effort was made to involve faith-based organization in the Assembly, e.g. by holding daily “Faith for Earth” dialogues, which attracted over 50 faith-based organizations and many other participants.

The representatives of accredited organizations participated actively in all segments of the Assembly, by providing written and oral input to the deliberations of member states. A multi-stakeholder dialogue during the high-level segment of the agenda provided a unique opportunity for dialogue between Major Groups and high-level decision makers.

Asked, how they would you rate their experience at UNEA-4, survey participants from civil society answered:

![Image showing survey results]

In addition to the official sessions of the 2017 Assembly (March 11 – 15), the following main events took place that provided opportunities for non-governmental stakeholders to engage with decision makers:

- March 7 – 8, 2019: Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum, which facilitated the participation of civil society in the Environment Assembly and associated meetings
- March 11 – 15: Green tent, an open space for civil society and their events
- March 11 – 15: Faith for Earth Dialogue
- March 11 – 15: Meetings of the Partnership for Combatting Marine Litter
- March 11 – 15: SDG Tent
- March 4 – 8: The fourth open-ended meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives
- March 9 - 10: Global Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment
- March 11 - 15: The Sustainable Innovation Expo

Evaluating the participation of non-governmental organizations in UNEA 4, the following recommendations emerged:

- Appropriate funding should be made available for Major Groups participation, including in the UNEA preparatory process
- In case the Open-Ended Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (OECPR) to UNEP is held back to back with future UNEAs, the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum shall be held before the OECPR
- Upcoming UNEAs should provide dedicated spaces for Children and Youth, e.g. by organizing inter-generational dialogues (for instance as a part of the Science-Policy Forum) or by having events that specifically target this group.
- Member States and the UNEA Bureau are invited to consider to:
  - Ensure that each UNEA session guarantees speaking slots for interventions from Major Groups and respect that individual organizations may speak in their own right, as well as under the Major Groups and Stakeholders (MGS) umbrella
  - A dedicated session at the OECPR that will allow for meaningful interaction between Member States and Major Groups
  - To time the multi-stakeholder in a way that makes it possible for high level delegates/ministers to participate
  - Include representatives from Major Groups and Stakeholders in their delegations
- The Secretariat shall:
  - Facilitate regional and global follow up preparatory meetings and seminars to support the implementation of UNEA-4 and to prepare for UNEA-5. This will include at least one international multi-stakeholder meeting and meetings in all UNEP regions, if possible, back to back with ministerial meetings such as Meeting of African Ministers of the Environment (AMCEN)
  - Organize and implement a training and capacity building program for young environmental leaders, helping them to better understand the opportunities and requirements for engaging with UNEA and UNEP.

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