



## Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

### Aarhus Convention: 23rd meeting of the Working Group of the Parties Geneva, 26-28 June 2019

Distinguished participants,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) - the world's largest regional security organisation - in its comprehensive approach to security, recognizes the role of co-operation on environmental issues to prevent conflict and build trust and mutual confidence between countries.

Access to information, public participation in environmental decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters (the three pillars of the Aarhus Convention) are means to empower citizens to play a greater role in promoting environmentally sound policies in their countries, and are therefore considered as prerequisite for addressing environment and security challenges.

With the purpose of facilitating the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and turning its principles into concrete action on the ground, the OSCE, through the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities and the OSCE field operations, supports the establishment and the functionality of the Aarhus Centres since 2002. Currently, there is a wide network of Aarhus Centres in 14 countries in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia, actively engaged in improving public awareness on environmental issues, disseminating information at local and national level, carrying out trainings and capacity-building activities, facilitating public participation in environmental decision-making and, overall, promoting good environmental governance.

The OSCE continues to provide platforms to enable sharing of experiences, best practices and lessons learnt among these Centres at national and regional as well as cross-regional levels. In this respect, I would like to refer to the Aarhus Centres Annual Meetings that we organize every year to bring together representatives of Aarhus Convention National Focal Points, Aarhus Centres managers, NGOs, relevant national and international partner organizations and the OSCE Field Operations to have an interactive exchange and discuss future priorities. We are grateful to the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat for the close collaboration in the planning and the conduct of these annual meetings. The last meeting, in 2018, was held in the picturesque location of Issyk-Kul in Kyrgyzstan and focused on the Aarhus Centres' contributions to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and their engagement towards achievement of selected Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

The next Annual Meeting will take place on 16 and 17 October 2019 in Vienna and will include, among others, a session focused on public participation in Environmental Impact Assessment and Aarhus Centres' engagement in implementing the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment.

The OSCE has a longstanding engagement in the capacity-building framework established by the Parties to the Aarhus Convention. In this context, the OSCE continues to support the implementation of several capacity building activities focusing on all three pillars of the Convention, including the access to justice pillar, through dedicated workshops and training programmes for high-level judges and representatives of national judicial training centres in South Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus countries, in collaboration with the UNECE. We have also organized capacity building programmes on PRTR at national and regional levels.

The OSCE remains committed to supporting the activities of the Aarhus Centres across the OSCE region and to reinforce their role in building confidence between citizens and authorities. It will continue to promote the values of the Aarhus Convention as crucial elements in addressing critical environmental security challenges.

In conclusion, let me thank, first of all, our government counterparts, particularly the Aarhus Convention National Focal Points in the countries where we work and also our donors who invested resources in our work. We are also thankful to the UNECE Aarhus Convention Secretariat for their continued support and collaboration.