Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen

• It is with great pleasure that I am addressing this thematic session on promoting the Aarhus Convention’s principles in international forums.

• I would like to extend a warm welcome to the representatives of all Parties and stakeholders who join us today and, in particular to the panelists from Albania, France, Georgia, the European Commission, the Danish Board of Technology, European ECO-Forum, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the World Trade Organization.

• The UNECE is particularly proud to host this meeting in Geneva as it takes place at a time when the global community is called to respond to major environmental challenges and set out the necessary priorities that should help build a better world for future generations.

• 2015 is in other words a milestone year for environmental governance and therefore the principles of the Aarhus Convention are of increasing relevance.

• I would like to take this opportunity and express our appreciation to France for its strong and effective leadership for this challenging, but so needed work.

• The importance of public awareness and public participation was already highlighted during the UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, which was the first global event of the year that aimed to build a safer environment for generations to come.
• The Aarhus principles are also guiding the discussions on the post 2015 development agenda, which are already taking place and which will culminate with the adoption a new agenda for global action (what is now the zero draft; document: “Transforming our world by 2030: A new agenda for global action”) during the United Nations Summit in New York in September this year.

• Furthermore, the negotiations leading to the United Nations Climate Change Conference, which will take place in Paris this year, also offer a great opportunity to governments, NGOs, business, academia and other stakeholders, to discuss challenges, exchange ideas and to reach a joint commitment for a universal climate agreement. And it is only through a participatory process, engaging all nations and diverse stakeholders, that we stand any chance of attaining the objective of mitigating and adapting to impacts of climate change.

• These thematic sessions of the Working Group play an important role as they provide a unique forum to share information, good practices and challenges in a number of different contexts. They also inspire countries and stakeholders to take commitments and follow up with the necessary actions.

• I am convinced that today’s meeting will provide ample opportunities to participants to explore how transparency and effective public participation in environmental decision-making can help implement the post-2015 development agenda, engage the public in UNEP work and climate change-related processes, and ensure that environmental concerns are duly taken into account when carrying out international trade negotiations.

• I would like to thank all those present for their strong commitment to supporting the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol in their own country and for the promotion of these unique treaties across the globe.

• Last week, our celebration of the World Environment Day and our common goal for a healthy future was guided by the motto: “Seven Billion Dreams. One Planet. Consume with Care”. Today, I encourage you to continue dreaming, to continue caring about our environment and to continue promoting environmental democracy, protecting the rights of every person and inspiring other international
processes to join our common efforts to build a better, healthy and sustainable environment for all.