

Ninth Meeting of the Working Group of the Parties of the Aarhus Convention

Geneva 13 – 15 February 2008

By Jennifer Ricketts and Anke Stock

On 13 till 15 February 2008 the Working Group of the Parties of the Aarhus Convention took place in Geneva (for more information see [here](#)). As part of the European ECO-Forum WECF participated in this meeting.

First of all, the Executive Secretary of the Aarhus Secretariat Jeremy Wates presented the status of ratification of the Convention and the [Protocol on PRTRs](#). It was recognised that the process of the ratification of the PRTR Protocol (one new ratification) and the GMO Amendment (six new ratifications) still is very slow and there are not many changes since the last meeting.

Under the item “Preparations for third ordinary meeting of the Parties” Latvia as host country of the meeting from 11 to 13 June 2008 provided information about the organisation of the event. This was followed by a short discussion about the provisional agenda of the meeting and the presentation of the Riga Declaration. Comments on this declaration can be submitted to the Secretariat till 7 March 2008 and a new draft will be discussed in Riga (for the draft documents see <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/wgp.htm#9thwgp>).

Furthermore, the draft statement on the Protocol on PRTRs prepared by the Bureau of the Working Group on PRTRs was presented; it will now hopefully be adopted in Riga. The next meeting of this Working Group will take place on 11 March 2008 in Paris.

The issue of the GMO Amendment was especially discussed in respect to Art. 14 of the Convention referring to the entry into force of the amendment. The Secretariat will contact the UN legal section for further advice and will look at the [Basel Convention](#) which provides for a similar process. Furthermore, the preparations for an international expert meeting on access to information, public participation and access to justice in the field of genetically modified organisms, scheduled to take place on 19 and 20 May 2008 in Cologne back to back with the Meeting of the Parties to the [Cartagena Protocol](#), were reviewed.

On the second day the draft decision on access to justice was discussed in respect to funding possibilities and the need to have a task force or even a working group for this issue. While the EU mentioned that there is no need for an Aarhus Justice Fund, the European ECO-Forum stressed that the lack of public interest and the hesitating habit of NGOs to use the access to justice provisions of the Convention especially derives from a lack of funding.

Under the item “Compliance mechanism” the Secretariat reminded the Parties of the regulations regarding the election procedure of the Compliance Committee and encouraged the Parties and other stakeholders to nominate candidates till 18 March 2008. It was also mentioned that the 19th meeting of the Committee on 5 -7 March 2008 will result in a report and specific recommendations which is going to be presented to MOP-3 in Riga in June 2008.

In respect to reporting requirements the Parties that have not yet submitted their national implementation reports (NIRs) were requested to do so as soon as possible. The Secretariat also encouraged NGOs to actively take part in the process of drafting NIRs.

Under the items “Public Participation in Strategic Decision-Making (PPSD)” and “Public Participation in International Forums (PPIF)” there were discussions on the need of task forces in this area and the effectiveness of workshops and other capacity building activities. While there are disagreements in respect to the establishment of a task force for PPSD, there was consensus of the continuation of the task force for PPIF.

Mostly discussed was the draft version of the Long-term Strategic Plan (for more see [here](#)). New statements, especially from the EU, were presented and argued about. Comments on this item should be submitted to the Secretariat till 7 March 2008. A new version will be presented in Riga.

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