



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Note

Paper 68/16

6 October 2016

NIAR 379-16

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Aarhus Convention

Introduction

The following note is in response to a Committee request concerning the responsible body or depository of the Aarhus Convention.

Background

The Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, provides people with the rights to easily access information, participate effectively in decision making in environmental matters and to seek if rights were violated.

The Convention is not only an environmental agreement, but also a Convention about government accountability and transparency, as it has the following pillars:

1. The right to access environmental information.
2. The right to participate in environmental decision making.
3. Access to justice with the right to review and challenge procedures on public decisions.¹

¹ EC Aarhus Convention <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/aarhus/>

In summary the Convention:

- links environmental rights, human rights and justice;
- establishes that sustainable development must include the involvement of all stakeholders;
- links governments' accountability and environmental protection; and
- focuses on interactions between the public and public authorities.²

The Convention has 47 parties. The European Union and the UK ratified the Convention in 2005.

Responsible Body of the Convention

The Aarhus Convention is a convention of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). This is one of five regional commissions of the United Nations which include the:

- Economic Commission for Africa (ECA),
- Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP),
- Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC),
- Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).³

UNECE includes 56 member states in Europe, North America and Asia.⁴

One of UNECE's missions is to enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations through the regional implementation of the outcomes of global United Nations conferences and summits.⁵

² UNECE Aarhus Convention <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/welcome.html>

³ UNECE Aarhus Convention Mission <http://www.unece.org/mission.html>

⁴ For all 56 member states see http://www.unece.org/oes/nutshell/member_States_representatives.html

⁵ UNECE Aarhus Convention Mission <http://www.unece.org/mission.html>