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Meeting of the Parties to the
Convention on Access to Information,
Public Participation in Decision-making and
Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

Working Group of the Parties to the Convention
(Second meeting, Geneva, 3-4 May 2004)
(Item 6 of the provisional agenda)

**REPORT OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE TASK FORCE
ON ELECTRONIC INFORMATION TOOLS**

1.   The second meeting of the Task Force on Electronic Information Tools established by the
Meeting of the Parties (decision I/6) was held in Geneva on 26-27 January 2004.

2.   The meeting was attended by experts designated by the Governments of Austria, Belarus,
Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Italy,
Kyrgyzstan, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro,
Spain, Sweden, Tajikistan, United Kingdom and Uzbekistan, as well as by the Commission of
the European Communities and the European Environment Agency (EEA).

3.   The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was also represented.

4.   The following international non-governmental and regional organizations were
represented: European ECO Forum, GRID/Arendal, GRID/Geneva, Milieukontakt Oost-Europa
(Netherlands), the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) and the
Russian Regional Environmental Centre (RREC).

5.   The following national non-governmental organizations were represented: BlueLink
Network (Bulgaria) and StrawberryNet (Romania).

6.   The Chair of the Task Force, Ms. Svetlana Zhekova (Bulgaria), opened the meeting and welcomed the participants to Geneva. Ms. Zhekova reminded the Task Force of the mandate set out in decision I/6, adopted at the first meeting of the Parties, and expressed the hope that the meeting would provide an opportunity to build upon the work that the Task Force had accomplished at its first meeting.

I.   ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

7.   Having regard to its mandate, the Task Force adopted the following agenda for its work:
1.   Adoption of the agenda.
2.   Election of officers.
3.   Relevant developments since the first meeting.
4.   Sharing and documenting good practices.
5.   Draft recommendations on the more effective use of electronic information tools.
6.   Priority themes at the regional and subregional levels.
7.   Capacity-building activities.
8.   Clearing-house mechanism.
9.   Organization of further work.

II.   ELECTION OF OFFICERS

8.   Mr. Chris Jarvis (United Kingdom) was elected as Vice-Chair.

III.   RELEVANT DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE FIRST MEETING

9.   The secretariat gave a brief presentation on the outcome of the World Summit on the Information Society and the side event on the Aarhus Convention that it had organized. The event had focused on the use of electronic information tools to strengthen the environmental rights of citizens and to promote good environmental governance. A round of presentations by experts from governments and international and non-governmental organizations had demonstrated good practices in the use of electronic tools to promote government accountability and to empower citizens. The theme of the event was reflected in two prominent themes in the Declaration of Principles and the Plan of Action adopted at the Summit, namely the need for universal access to information and the promotion of principles of environmental sustainability in the information society.

10.   Mr. Mikhail Kokine, Secretary to the UNECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, gave a presentation on its activities. As part of its mandate, the Working Group sought to promote better information management in support of environmental assessments in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia (EECCA). To improve the coordination of national environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting, and to strengthen EECCA information and observation capacity, the Working Group had engaged in capacity-building activities to generate environmental data and information (including monitoring networks, remote sensing, inventories and modelling), data management, and data presentation/communication. 118 indicators designed to support national and pan-European state-of-the-environment reporting had been tested in a six-country trial compendium, which

would soon be available on a compact disk. It had also developed an electronic database on networks and data sources in EECCA. The possibility of extending the work on indicators was being explored, in particular with a view to supporting the preparations for the sixth Ministerial 'Environment for Europe' Conference to be held in 2007.

11.   The secretariat reported on discussions relevant to the work of the Task Force that had taken place at the first meeting of the Working Group of the Parties. The Working Group had invited the Task Force to give further consideration to the issue of the 'digital divide', and had suggested that further work was needed to facilitate the sharing of experiences and information in the area of strategic environmental decision-making through electronic and other means (MP.PP/WG.1/2003/2, paras. 25 -27 and 44).

IV.   SHARING AND DOCUMENTING GOOD PRACTICES

12.   The meeting provided an opportunity for the sharing of information and experience in the use of electronic information tools and also to consider which mechanisms or steps could be taken to further document and share examples of good practice. Before the meeting, delegations had been invited to submit in writing their responses to a questionnaire on recent developments with respect to the use of electronic information tools to promote the implementation of the Convention in their countries. The following information had been requested:

    (a)   Establishment of a national web portal with access to environmental information;

    (b)   Development of a web site with access to information on the status of implementation of the Aarhus Convention;

    (c)   Capacity-building activities in the four priority areas identified at the first meeting of the Task Force;

    (d)   Twinning projects;

    (e)   Designated contact point for the Convention's clearing-house mechanism.

13.   The secretariat briefly presented a summary of the main findings on the basis of 19 responses sent by representatives of both governments and organizations. Among the key points were the following:

    (a)   The majority of respondents reported that their respective countries and organizations had already developed web pages with environmental information in the sense of article 5, paragraph 3, of the Convention. In 25% of the cases, this information could not be accessed through a single web portal, but was available on several web sites maintained by different government ministries and agencies;

    (b)   In response to question (b), approximately 50% of respondents said that a web site with information on the national status of implementation of the Convention had been developed in their countries, with another 25% reporting that such web sites were under development;

(c)   Information centres were the focus of capacity-building activities in six countries, these comprising both West European countries and countries with economies in transition. Most of these countries reported on further efforts to decentralize the provision of environmental information to the public by setting up information centres at the level of regional or local authorities. Two delegations reported that they had either already developed or were in the process of setting up information centres in the virtual environment. Some respondents stressed a need to supplement the use of electronic tools with the provision of information in traditional, non-electronic formats;

(d)   Over 50% of respondents reported on existing twinning arrangements and some of them included information on multilateral cooperation in their responses. The latter projects most often involved cooperation between countries established within the context of a subregional initiative (for example, the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe). One delegation reported on a twinning arrangement on the establishment of national pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs) with countries outside the UNECE region;

(e)   An overwhelming majority of respondents submitted contact information on the designated contact point for the development of the clearing-house mechanism. Some respondents wanted to learn more about the tasks and responsibilities before designating a contact person for this project.

14.   The secretariat encouraged delegations that had not yet responded to the questionnaire to do so even though the deadline had passed.

15.   The Chair invited delegations to contribute to the discussion by presenting examples of good practice from their countries. The presentations highlighted the use of electronic information tools by both public authorities and NGOs in providing access to environmental information and facilitating public participation in environmental decision-making.

16.   The representative of BlueLink Network presented an electronic portal linking the web sites of environmental NGOs from South Eastern Europe. The system connected the websites of NGOs from South Eastern Europe and offered services such as news and mailing lists, but it also had a training component. The project was selected as one of nine finalists in the category of environmental web resources for the Stockholm Challenge Award for pioneering information technology projects worldwide (www.see-environment.info).

17.   The representative of Hungary presented the activities of the Ministry for the Environment with respect to the development of an integrated information system, GRID-Budapest, which provided new mechanisms for data collection and a new web site with information on the legal framework for the implementation of the Aarhus Convention (http://www.ktm.hu/gridbp/indexa.htm).

18.   The representative of Belgium gave an overview of the environmental management information system in Flanders, with a portal that provided access to thematic information of the regional environmental organizations (http://www.milieuinfo.be/). The web portal also provided a mechanism for public participation, the use of which had been a mixed success, due mostly to technical difficulties in providing a reliable system of identification of both individual and institutional participants in the process.

19.   The representative of the Russian Regional Environmental Centre gave an overview of existing government web resources at the national and subnational levels, and demonstrated the national web portal providing access to environmental information (http://priroda.ru). The portal, which contained over 3,000 references linked to the state of the environment in the Russian Federation, featured a search system and interactive access to information from 89 regions (http://oopt.priroda.ru).

20.   The representative of Milieukontakt Oost-Europa reported on a programme aimed at the development of national web portals in countries with economies in transition in order to promote the exchange of information among NGOs and other organizations, and increase their public visibility through building an electronic infrastructure (http://www.milieukontakt.nl).

21.   The representative of REC reported on the completion of an inventory and needs assessment of environmental libraries, collections and services in Central and Eastern Europe and the publication of a report on environmental information systems development and future priorities in eight countries and territories in South Eastern Europe. The report included national action plans with priorities for providing access to environmental information and recommendations for future action. In addition to this, REC was supporting the establishment of national pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs) in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. For the implementation of the environmental strategy for EECCA, the network of Regional Environmental Centres had developed a joint work programme for 2004-2007. One component was linked to the implementation of the Aarhus Convention and focused on institution building and priority identification in PRTRs, electronic tools and the media.

22.   The representative of UNEP presented the latest developments of three environmental information initiatives in which UNEP was involved. The UNEP.NET project (http://www.unep.net), a global initiative on access to environmental information, was undergoing a change in technical direction and a user needs assessment is being conducted. Some countries wanted to see a revised structure for the country profile application on UNEP.Net with additional content. The ECOLEX global environmental law gateway (http://www.ecolex.org/) had been officially launched in Rome on 2 December 2003. ECOLEX now comprised four cross-searchable databases with information on international environmental legal agreements, national legislation, court decisions and literature. This project was the result of direct collaboration among the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNEP and the World Conservation Union (IUCN). Finally, UNEP had concluded a series of meetings on the Science Initiative, which was aimed at strengthening the scientific base of UNEP. The consultations held with governments, scientific institutions and United Nations agencies had all highlighted the need to increase the availability and accessibility of environmental data and information. Further information on the Science Initiative was available on its web site (http://science.unep.org).

23.   The Chair invited delegations to express their views on the mechanisms and tools to further document good practices in their use to promote the implementation of the Convention. REC briefly presented the outcome of the work that it had undertaken under the previous task force, which had resulted in a compendium of 16 case studies related to the use of electronic tools to promote the implementation of articles 4-9 of the Convention. The results of this work were available in hard copy and as a fully searchable online case study gallery (http://www.rec.org/e-aarhus/). The Task Force was invited to consider whether this work should continue and in which form.

24.   Many delegations expressed their appreciation for the work undertaken by REC and supported its continuation, with some suggesting that the format of case studies should be simplified to facilitate the provision of new input into the compendium. It was suggested that a simple matrix should be developed to provide a clear overview of case studies and that there was a need to further develop and update the existing web site.

V.   DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE MORE EFFECTIVE USE OF ELECTRONIC INFORMATION TOOLS

25.   Mr. Johannes Mayer (Austria) presented an informal document 'Draft recommendations on the more effective use of electronic tools to provide public access to environmental information' which had been prepared by the voluntary core group established by the Task Force at its first meeting, in conjunction with the secretariat (MP.PP/WG.1/2003/4, para. 37 (a)). Emphasizing the non-binding character of the document, he said that the aim had been to produce a document which was general enough to cover a wide range of situations, and yet specific enough to lead to concrete actions.

26.   Delegations were invited to provide both general and specific comments on the draft text (see annex I for the revised version). Some delegations proposed that chapter II of the recommendations (Legislative Framework) should be amalgamated with chapter I (General Policy) and rephrased so that it would refer to general policy rather than legislation. Some of them argued that it would be difficult for countries to agree on recommendations that called for new domestic legal obligations. Other delegations considered that the national legislative framework was a legitimate and important topic for the recommendations, and not precluded by the mandate of the Task Force. They favoured retaining a separate section on the legislative framework, but thought that it would be necessary to review it, in particular with respect to the specific types of information that countries were required to make electronically accessible by law, and the extent to which such access should be provided free of charge. It was agreed to put the title of chapter II and some related text in square brackets to reflect the need for further discussion on this issue.

27.   It was also noted that, whereas for some categories of information listed in paragraph 9 (c) it could be recommended that all information should be made available through the Internet, for other categories it would be unrealistic to expect all information to be posted on the Internet. To reflect this, the word 'the' in the introductory sentence of subparagraph (c) was put in square brackets, but it was noted that an alternative approach would be to separate the list of categories into two, one for which all information would be put on the Internet, the other for which just some information would be put on the Internet.

28.   The issue of charging for information was discussed, and while it was seen as reasonable that some types of information should be free of charge, there were different views on whether charges in other cases should be limited to marginal costs for the provision of the information.

29.   The Task Force did not discuss in any detail chapters III and IV of the draft recommendations.

30.   On the basis of the comments made during the discussion, the Task Force amended the text and agreed to annex the revised text to its report (see annex I).

VI.   PRIORITY THEMES AT THE REGIONAL AND SUBREGIONAL LEVELS

31.   The Task Force agreed that more time was needed to work on the issue of regional and subregional priorities, and decided to postpone a discussion on this agenda item until its next meeting. To facilitate discussion on this issue, delegations were invited to consider the list of possible actions annexed to the report of the workshop which had taken place in Arendal (Norway) on 8-9 March 2001 (CEP/WG.5/2001/4), and to submit comments in advance of the next meeting of the Task Force.

VII.   CAPACITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

32.   Mr. Chris Jarvis (United Kingdom) gave a brief update on a project funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and developed by the United Kingdom's Environment Agency and UNEP on encouraging environmental democracy and improving access to environmental information. The project's goal was to help develop mechanisms to facilitate access to environmental information in EECCA by using modern information and communication technologies, in particular drawing on the experience of the Environment Agency in developing its environmental information portal 'What's In Your Backyard'. In the initial stage, the project would involve the organization of two workshops, one to explore the applicability of the framework in EECCA, and another to develop the framework and report on how this work could be carried forward.

33.   Mr. Nickolai Denisov (GRID-Arendal) gave an update on the four main capacity-building initiatives related to the use of electronic information tools in which his organization had been involved. The first project, electronic reporting of the state of the environment through the Internet, was in the stage of preparing updates for the countries that had prepared such reports for the Ministerial Conference 'Environment for Europe' (Kiev, 21-23 May 2003). The second project focused on capacity-building for environmental journalists and would in the future involve capacity-building activities aimed at public information departments in Albania, Armenia and Uzbekistan and the development of one-stop shops for electronic media in Serbia and Montenegro, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation. The third project, development of a web portal on water information in Central Asia, would be implemented jointly by UNECE and GRID-Arendal. Finally, the environment and security initiative between the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNEP would, in addition to opening information centres in South Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, focus on alternative models of resource centres in order to enable civil society organizations from these regions to play a more active role in the implementation of the Convention.

34.   The secretariat informed the Task Force of the outcome of an inter-agency coordination meeting, held on 30 September 2003, on the implementation of capacity-building activities in EECCA. The organizations present at the meeting had invited the secretariat to play a central coordinating role, which would imply a reduced direct involvement in the implementation of capacity-building activities.

35.   The Task Force took note of these developments and agreed that it should become a forum for the exchange of information on capacity-building activities in the area of electronic information tools in order to foster synergies and minimize overlaps among different projects and initiatives.

VIII.   CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM

36.   Mr. Nickolai Denisov and Mr. Stephen Lapointe (GRID-Arendal) gave an overview of the Convention's clearing-house mechanism that had been developed at GRID-Arendal and presented draft terms of reference for the establishment of national nodes. Mr. Denisov explained that the working version of the clearing house's central node had a web-based content management system (http://dev.grida.no/aarhus). National content to the system could be added in any of three formats: extensible mark-up language (XML), Microsoft Excel or text on library cards submitted to the clearing house's central node. Mr. Lapointe presented the first version of the clearing house, which allowed for information to be accessed through thematic categories, key word search or region. For countries that did not have Aarhus Convention web sites, a prototype web site comprising ten categories of information had been developed and was being tested at that time by three countries.

37.   The Task Force endorsed the draft terms of reference for national nodes as a working basis for developing the national nodes and agreed to annex them to the report of its meeting (see annex II).

IX.   ORGANIZATION OF FURTHER WORK

38.   The Task Force agreed that further work was needed to finalize the text of the draft recommendations that would be submitted to the Working Group of the Parties for review and possible adoption at the second ordinary meeting of the Parties. Having agreed that another meeting was necessary to complete this work, the Task Force left it to the Chair, Vice-Chair and the Bureau of the Convention to find the most suitable date for the meeting.

39.   It was agreed that the secretariat, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Task Force, would prepare a draft report of the meeting and circulate it to all delegations for comments.

40.   Several delegations proposed that, to organize further work, the Task Force should explore possibilities for developing an electronic data repository where drafts of official documents could be accessed easily by the members of the Task Force. The secretariat agreed to explore different options to facilitate access to and exchange of information in the virtual environment in a manner that would be user-friendly and avoid duplication of existing electronic resources currently available to the members of the Task Force.

X.   CLOSE OF THE MEETING

41.   As no other issues were raised under any other business, the Chair thanked the participants for their contributions and closed the meeting.

Annex I

**DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE MORE EFFECTIVE USE OF
ELECTRONIC INFORMATION TOOLS TO PROVIDE PUBLIC ACCESS TO
ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION**

The Meeting,

Noting the requirement in article 5, paragraph 2, of the Convention on each Party to ensure that environmental information is effectively accessible, inter alia, by establishing and maintaining practical arrangements such as publicly accessible lists, registers or files to which access is provided free of charge,

Noting also the requirement in article 5, paragraph 3, of the Convention on each Party to ensure that environmental information progressively becomes available in electronic databases which are easily accessible to the public through public telecommunications networks,

Emphasizing the increasing use of electronic tools such as web services, databases and information and communication technologies (ICT), without neglecting the importance of traditional means of communication to satisfy the information needs of citizens living in different conditions and regions,

Noting the outcome of the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, in particular the Declaration of Principles, which recognizes the potential importance of ICT applications in the protection of the environment and the management of natural resources, and the Plan of Action, which encourages governments to provide adequate access through various communication resources, notably the Internet, to public official information and, in cooperation with other stakeholders, to use and promote ICT as an instrument for environmental protection and the sustainable use of natural resources,

Resolving to give practical effect to those conclusions of the first phase of the Summit relevant to the promotion of environmental democracy,

Recognizing that advances in ICT need to be accompanied by corresponding developments in legislative and institutional frameworks, so as to provide appropriate guarantees of the rights of public access to information in electronic form,

Recognizing also the importance of using electronic information tools to provide public access to information in the context of environment-related decision-making procedures, with a view to promoting public participation in such procedures,

Welcoming the work undertaken by its Task Force on Electronic Information Tools,

Recalling the four priority themes identified at the first meeting of the Task Force:
(a)   The use of ICT to facilitate public participation in environmental matters;
(b)   Establishing information centres in both virtual and physical environments;
(c)   Identifying strategies for active communication and dissemination of information;
(d)   Addressing legal, financial and technological barriers to Internet access,

Recommends to Parties, Signatories and other interested States to undertake the following measures:

GENERAL POLICY

1.   Formulate and implement national "e-government" strategies for the use of electronic tools to facilitate administrative processes and services, to make public administration more transparent and efficient in providing available environmental information and dealing with requests for such information from the public;

2.   Support the reduction and as far as possible the removal of social, financial and technological barriers restricting public access to telecommunications networks, such as high connection costs and poor connectivity, as well as lack of basic computer literacy;

3.   Promote and use electronic information tools to facilitate public input to and monitoring of environmental decision-making processes, among other things to:
        (a)   Alert the public to respective opportunities;
        (b)   Ensure that the public can provide publicly documented feedback on proposed activities, plans, programmes, policies and legally binding instruments electronically; and
        (c)   Ensure that submissions received electronically are given equal weight to comments received non-electronically;

4.   Promote and contribute to international policy dialogue on the use of electronic information tools to promote public access to environmental information and public participation in environmental decision-making through the exchange of experience, documentation and sharing of best practice, the transfer of know-how and the provision of technical assistance;

5.   Establish and, in the case of donor countries, provide financial and technological support for schemes for the transfer of technology and expertise so as to overcome or reduce the 'digital divide', e.g. through bilateral projects;

6.   Base the provision of environmental information from governmental and non-governmental sources on the assessment of user needs, monitor the form and content of the information provided in relation to user needs, and assess the impact of the information delivered, in order to raise environmental awareness and facilitate active engagement;

7.   Provide information in the national language(s) and at least basic information of interest to the international community in English;

8.   Document best practices related to the national and local application of the Convention in those areas outlined in paragraph 9 (c) below, and share information on these through the online gallery of case studies of the Task Force on Electronic Information Tools;

[LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK]

9.   [Explore the possibilities for periodically reviewing and, as necessary, updating] [Periodically review and, as necessary, update] legislative frameworks regulating the availability of environmental information in the light of developments in ICT, so as to:

(a)   Provide access to environmental information in electronic form, so that information required to be publicly available upon request under the Convention is to be provided in electronic form where so requested and where the information exists in that form;

(b)   Require documentation which is integral to environmental decision-making processes to be provided in electronic form (e.g. emission licence applications, draft development plans);

(c)   Require, with guidance on practical implementation, that, in line with identified user needs, [the] information of the following types should be publicly accessible, in a timely manner, through the Internet:

(i)   Reports on the state of the environment;
(ii)   Texts of legislation, regulations, rules and other legally binding instruments on or relating to the environment;
(iii) Texts of policies, plans and programmes on or relating to the environment, and environmental agreements;
(iv)   Environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment documentation;
(v)   Environmental monitoring data held by or on behalf of public authorities (e.g. ground-level ozone concentrations), including spatial attributes (e.g. longitude/latitude coordinates associated with such environmental monitoring);
(vi)   Data on environmentally significant releases and transfers of pollutants, including spatial attributes (e.g. longitude/latitude coordinates associated with such pollutant releases and transfer reports);
(vii) Documentation forming an integral part of any licensing or permitting process (e.g. applications for licences or permits, opportunities for commenting and providing feedback, comments of third parties, draft and final licences and attached conditions);
(viii) Product information that enables consumers to make informed environmental choices;
(ix)   Best practice information and guidelines on better environmental management;
(x)   Appropriate metadata or background information so that the methods, processes and standards of data collection are transparent to future data users;
(xi)   Mechanisms related to access to justice;
(xii) Meta-information including catalogues of data sources and details on authorities' holdings and mechanisms for the provision of access to environmental information;

(d)   Provide the information referred to in subparagraphs (c) (i) to (iv) free of charge [and as completely as possible], and other information free of charge where appropriate, [or against recovery of not more than the marginal costs for the provision of the information.]

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

10.   Establish, in both physical and virtual environments, environmental information centres that will facilitate public access to information and public participation in environmental decision-making;

11.   Promote access to electronically stored environmental information by establishing and maintaining community Internet access points;

12.   Establish a one-stop access point for citizen-oriented e-government services, with coordinated input from the relevant public authorities;

13.   Develop human capacity for the use of electronic information tools to promote the implementation of the Convention through comprehensive and forward-looking training and education strategies for public officials;

14.   Undertake efforts to develop the institutional capacities of public authorities to collect, organize, store and share environmental information in easily accessible and user-friendly formats;

15.   Apply a proven methodology and/or specific indicators to measure the performance of public authorities with respect to use of electronic information tools to promote the implementation of the Convention and set specific targets to benchmark the impact of e-government programmes and projects within urban and rural communities;

16.   Introduce and promote comprehensive e-literacy programmes, including specific training programmes linking the use of information technology applications to the promotion of good environmental governance;

17.   Ensure the availability of commonly readable, user-friendly and easily transferable formats for data and information;

18.   Promote the involvement of different stakeholders representing both providers and users of information, including civil society and private sector institutions, in the development and use of electronic tools with a view to improving the accessibility, as well as the availability, of environmental information to the public;

CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM

19.   Maintain a national web site with information related to the nationwide implementation of the Convention, which will serve as the national node of the Convention's clearing-house mechanism;

20.   Designate contact points responsible for collecting, managing and updating the information contained in the national node and for providing the necessary information for the central node of the Convention's clearing-house mechanism.

<u>**Annex II**</u>

**DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF
A NATIONAL NODE OF THE AARHUS CONVENTION'S CLEARING HOUSE**

A. <u>Tasks</u>

1.   Create an Aarhus Convention clearing house web site presence (also called national node) for your country following the guidelines below.

2.   Provide the necessary reference information on national Convention-related content for the central node of the clearing house.

B. <u>Implementation of Task 1</u>

3.   The national contact points and technical developers are free to decide about the visual design and structure of the country's Aarhus Convention web presence.

4.   Recommended items in the national node home pages are listed below. The most important components are the resource directory and the search facility:

- Resource directory (the main body of Convention-related content to be included in the clearing house), with content items described according to common content attributes;
- News;
- Calendar (convention-related activities in the country);
- Search (see below);
- Text of the Convention in the national language (s);
- English and local language switch button;
- National coordinator, focal points for the Convention's task forces, working groups and other bodies (contact details);
- Governmental, non-governmental, academic and other organizations most active in Convention-related activities in the country (contact details, links to web sites);
- Date of the last update of the page;
- Logo of the Convention (linked to www.unece.org/env/pp/);
- Link to the Aarhus Convention's clearing house (uniform resource locator (URL) to be decided).

5.   The information resources in each national node should, as far as possible, include:
- Legislation;
- Regulations, procedures and guidelines;
- Proceedings, handbooks, manuals, methodologies;
- Project descriptions, reports;
- Feasibility studies.

MP.PP/WG.1/2004/4
Page 14
Annex II

Web sites of relevant organizations and main policy players	The content attributes	Interpretation
What is the goal?		
Topics	Access to information →	Includes guidebooks, methodologies, best practice examples of access to information.
Topics	Public participation→	Includes public participation procedures, projects, awareness-raising activities, e.g. campaigns; guidebooks; methodologies and best practice in public participation matters.
Topics	Access to justice →	Includes information on access to justice, including articles, guidebooks, methodologies, best practices, projects and other relevant information.
Special focus list	Pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTR)→	It includes references to technical reports, guidebooks, methodologies and best practices in implementation of national PRTRs.
Special focus list	Genetically modified organisms	Includes references to scientific reports, guidebooks, methodologies and best practices in dealing with public participation in decision-making on GMOs.
Special focus list	Strategic decision-making →	Includes information related to public participation in environmental decision-making at the strategic level, including relevant legislation, policies and projects.
	Electronic information tools →	Includes legislation, policy papers, project information, scientific studies and other information on the use of electronic tools to provide access to information to the public and facilitate public participation in environmental decision-making.
How is it achieved?		
Activities and instruments	Legislation →	Legislative, regulative and other measures (laws, regulations, etc.) related to the national implementation of the Aarhus Convention.
	Policies →	Policies are a set of plans which are directed to achieve the goal (e.g. national programmes, action plans, awareness raising and education policies). This should include only items directly related to the implementation of the Convention or its themes.

	Projects →	Should include only information on projects directly contributing to the implementation of the Convention in the country, e.g. Tacis project on environment education, information and public awareness, progress reports from newly independent States, etc.
	Research →	Information on books, articles, studies and academic projects related to the themes of the Convention.
Who does what?		
Sources	Government	Official information on the national status of implementation of the Convention will be provided primarily by governments and national nodes will provide a gateway to the information stored in one or several government web sites.
	Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)	NGOs often maintain web pages with relevant information on national or international projects or activities and may become nodes of the clearing house.
	Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs)	IGOs will often have documents or policies of interest for the Aarhus Convention posted on the Web and these may also become nodes of the clearing house. In many cases, this information will be linked to international projects or regional or global developments.
	Academic community	Web pages of education and research institutions often provide relevant information (e.g. articles, studies, academic projects on the themes of the Convention).

C.   <u>Implementation of Task 2</u>

6.   National node content managers should provide citation information (including a valid hyperlink) for all resource documents included in the national node web site. The information should be provided in English and, secondarily, in the local language.

7.   The citation information includes:
   - Title;
   - Link (URL for document if available online);
   - Description (abstract);
   - Publisher;
   - Language;
   - Date (publication date);
   - Subject/keywords (using below content attributes);
   - Country code.

8.   The content attributes include selected keywords through which it is possible to categorize the resources included in the clearing house.

How to provide citation information?

9.   Reference information for documents and activities (e.g. document title and publication year) may be entered using the Aarhus Convention's clearing-house online content management system. The interface for entering these resource descriptions is available in both English and Russian. To obtain login privileges for online content management, please contact the Convention's secretariat.

10.   If a national node is not able to use the online content management system, the citations can be provided in either of these two ways:
- By creating a spreadsheet (e.g. Microsoft Excel) with the citation information included, using a spreadsheet file template provided by the clearing house;
- By creating citation text documents in XML using rich site summary (RSS) format and posting them on a public server or e-mailing them to the clearing-house project officer.

D.   Search mechanism

11.   GRID-Arendal will, where appropriate, provide an easily implemented search mechanism for the national nodes. It will enable a search of all resources references by the clearing house at the central and national nodes. The search mechanism will be very simple, requiring pasting a snippet of code on the search form page.