

Opening Remarks

JOINT CBD/AARHUS CONVENTION SIDE EVENT FOR THE EIGHTH SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE AARHUS CONVENTION

Promoting transparency and participatory approaches to biosafety-related decision-making

18 November 2025, Geneva, Switzerland

Opening remarks from the Chair of the Fourth Joint Aarhus Convention and Convention on Biological Diversity Round Table on Public Awareness, Education, Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice regarding LMOs/GMOs

Good afternoon to everyone in-person and online, after the GMO session during the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the UNECE Aarhus Convention (MOP-8) this morning.

We welcome all of you to this side event entitled “Promoting transparency and participatory approaches to biosafety-related decision-making”.

My name is Helmut Gaugitsch, Head of Program Biodiversity and International Cooperation in the Environment Agency Austria. I had the honour to act as Chair of the Fourth Joint Aarhus Convention and Convention on Biological Diversity Round Table on Public Awareness, Education, Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice regarding LMOs/GMOs

Distinguished delegates and colleagues,

It is a great honor to welcome you to this historic occasion. Today, we celebrate a milestone that has been two decades in the making—the entry into force of the GMO Amendment to the Aarhus Convention. Adopted in Almaty in 2005, this amendment is now fully operational, reinforcing the Convention’s three pillars: access to information, public participation, and access to justice.

Why is this so significant? Because it ensures that these rights apply to decisions on the deliberate release and placing on the market of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). In doing so, it strengthens environmental democracy and builds trust in how we govern modern biotechnology.

This achievement is not in isolation. It complements the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, which promotes the safe handling, transfer and use of living modified organisms (LMOs) and requires public awareness, education and participation, including access to information, under Article 23 of the Protocol.

Together, these two instruments form a powerful framework for transparency and inclusive decision-making. They advance Rio Principle 10 and support the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, particularly targets on biosafety and access to justice.

I want to commend the 33 Parties that ratified the amendment and acknowledge the tireless efforts of civil society, experts, and international organizations. Your dedication has made this possible.

But let us be clear: today is not only about celebration—it is about momentum. We must accelerate implementation. I urge remaining Parties to ratify the amendment and integrate its provisions into national frameworks. Collaboration between Aarhus and Cartagena stakeholders will be key to success.

This is a victory for transparency, participation, and environmental democracy. It is a reminder that when we work together, we can ensure modern biotechnology serves people and nature.

We also thank the 29th Working Group on the collaborative recommendations for the two secretariats and between Member States and Parties to the CBD and the Aarhus Convention. Today's discussion from the GMO session at MOP-8 resulted in excellent decisions on the way forward.

Thank you for your commitment and let us continue this journey with renewed determination.