



8TH SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE AARHUS CONVENTION
5TH SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE PROTOCOL ON PRTRs
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Side event: Promoting transparency and participatory approaches to biosafety-related decision-making

Geneva, 18 November 2025, 13:30-14:45 CET, H.207-208-209

Organized by: UNECE, CBD, Austria

Mr. Marco Keiner
Director, UNECE Environment Division

Welcoming remarks

Dear colleagues,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is my great pleasure to address this important side event on the margins of the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, organized jointly by UNECE, the Convention on Biodiversity with its Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Government of Austria.
- The Aarhus Convention promotes access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters. The GMO Amendment to the Aarhus Convention, which obliges the Parties to ensure transparency and public participation in decisions concerning the deliberate release and placing on the market of genetically modified organisms, GMO in short, strengthens these three pillars.
- This year finally marks the entry into force of this amendment, which was adopted in 2005. On 20 January 2025, Ukraine has deposited its instrument of ratification. This triggered the entry into force of the GMO amendment on 20 April 2025, thereby sending a clear message on the centrality of transparency, accountability and good governance in environmental decision-making. If we wish to build societies based on trust, if we wish to ensure health and food safety, this is impossible without transparency and participatory decision-making.
- It is my great pleasure to join you today in discussing how we can work on the achievement of these aims. This issue clearly stands at the intersection of environmental governance and

sustainable development and is thus fundamental to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

- In the field of biosafety, the stakes are particularly high. Decisions on genetically modified organisms affect ecosystems, food security and human health. Transparent and participatory decision-making ensures that such measures are evidence-based and that the public can voice their concerns and contribute to informed choices.
- Therefore, I would like to underline that transparency and effective public participation in this area directly support the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as the public perception of the relationship between GMOs and SDGs. In example:
 - SDG 2 (zero hunger): Promote sustainable agriculture and food security through sound environmental governance.
 - SDG 15 (life on land): Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems and halt biodiversity loss.
 - SDG 16 (responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making): Promote peaceful and inclusive societies, ensure access to justice and build effective, accountable institutions.
- These goals remind us that environmental governance is not just about protecting nature, but about empowering people and building trust between governments, scientists and the public. Transparency and participation are therefore enablers of innovation, not barriers to progress.
- Let us reaffirm that only together we can establish effective biosafety framework allowing . I encourage all stakeholders to continue collaborating in this spirit, and to use the Aarhus principles as a guide to achieving the SDGs.
- In light of this, UNECE continues to collaborate closely with the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. This allows us to exchange knowledge and good practices and to promote policy coherence and capacity development among the Parties to our Conventions.
- I also wish to express our gratitude to the Government of Austria for its solid and continuous leadership over the past years and for co-organizing today's event.
- This event gives us the possibility to celebrate the amendment's entry into force and to discuss the way forward and possible future activities in this area. Let me therefore conclude by wishing you all a very interesting and fruitful side event.