Category: Procedural Obligations - General

Sub-Category: Treaties and Instruments

Name of Good Practice: **Aarhus Centres**

Key Words: Aarhus Convention, Access to Information, Awareness Raising, Education, Implementation, Internet, Participation, Principle 10, Right to a Healthy Environment, Rio Declaration,

Implementing Actors: International Organisation: Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe; National Ministries; Civil Society Organisations

Location: Global

Description: In an effort to support the implementation of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters by providing members of the public with practical resources to exercise their environmental rights under the Aarhus Convention, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has maintained a network of Aarhus Centres since 2002. The OSCE has helped to establish Aarhus Centres in several countries, including Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Serbia and Tajikistan. The OSCE partners with the governments of the participating States where these Centres are located as well as leading environmental NGOs in these countries. The Aarhus Centres are usually based on an agreement between the relevant OSCE field operation and the Ministry for Environment in the respective country and managed by a board consisting of an equal number of representatives from government and civil society.

The Aarhus Centres conduct a number of activities, including disseminating environmental information on regional and country-specific activities, carrying out educational and training projects relevant to the implementation of the Aarhus Convention, and providing a venue where members of the public can meet to discuss environmental concerns. According to the OSCE, the Aarhus Centres strengthen environmental governance by “assist[ing] the public with participating in environmental decision-making and facilitat[ing] access to justice on environmental matters, sensitizing the public and governments to their shared responsibility for their natural surroundings.” For example, the Khujand Aarhus Centre in northern Tajikistan conducted an extensive campaign to raise the awareness of the inhabitants of the town of Taboshar about the health risks associated with the nearby abandoned uranium mining site. In Armenia, Aarhus Centres held public discussions with community leaders, representatives of the water and sewage company, regional council members and residents to on drinking water and water quality, a longstanding problem in many municipalities.

 Further Information: OSCE’s website: <http://www.osce.org/>; further information can be found in a booklet on the Centres published by OSCE: <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/89067?download=true>; and the Aarhus Centre guidelines: <http://www.osce.org/eea/40506>.