

Mr Chairman,

Thank you for inviting me to speak.

I would like to stress the importance of Belarusian NGOs participating in the process of preparing a Report to the Meeting of the Parties on Belarus's implementation of the Committee's recommendations before the next Meeting of the Parties. But we believe it is especially significant to refine the recommendations made to Belarus for implementing the Convention. This significance should be viewed in the context of the experience of Belarus's compliance and non-compliance not only with the Aarhus Convention in general but also with the Committee's recommendations on two cases: the Neman hydropower plant (HPP) and the Ostrovets nuclear power plant (NPP).

The Belarusian experience shows that, although we can see some kind of positive moves in the area of improving legislation, as well as a desire on the part of the National Focal Point to follow the recommendations, when it comes to the practical application of the law, there is a complete void.

In my submission yesterday on behalf of Belarusian NGOs, I gave concrete examples of how the practice of implementing the Convention has been deteriorating in the context of the NPP case. This is now leading to a critical situation, in so far as the authorities are not only failing to comply with the Convention when making decisions connected with the NPP and to provide access to information, but are also arresting and intimidating activists. While one of the Committee's recommendations is the improvement of the practical application of the law, in practice compliance with the Convention following the adoption of conclusions and recommendations has markedly deteriorated.

We believe that it is possible to change this situation once the Committee's recommendations on the NPP case have been refined for the next Meeting of the Parties.

In our view, it would be useful to add concrete recommendations relating to the practical application of the law to the recommendations in this case. That, for instance, is what the Espoo Convention Implementation Committee did when it required Belarus to repeat procedures and review decisions where breaches had been noted. Belarus was not slow to react to those requirements, and organised repeat hearings for citizens of Lithuania. It is true that the conduct of those hearings involved further breaches, but that is another issue. Thus it would be effective, in our view, to refine the recommendations with regard to the practical application of the law, and we hope that these recommendations will be able to change the situation regarding implementation of the Aarhus Convention in Belarus on the issue of construction of an NPP – a situation which, in our view, has become catastrophic.

Thank you for your attention.