



Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention, 9th session, Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment, 5th session, Geneva, 12–15 December, 2023

The Espoo Convention funding crisis and the state of the trust fund

Dear Chairs, Honourable Delegates,

Twenty-five years ago the first Meeting of the Parties of the Espoo Convention took place and 2023 also marks the 20th anniversary of the Protocol. These instruments should be celebrated for their positive contribution to efforts to protect the environment with multilateral cooperation, but the support system which allows these mechanisms to operate is critically threatened by financial shortfalls.

Environmental NGOs wish to draw special attention to what the Secretariat has repeatedly communicated to the Parties: a longstanding scarcity of resources has caused an acute lack of staff for core work. These circumstances have continued for over twenty years, while the work plan and workload has continued to mount; this puts the functioning and servicing of the two treaties at risk.

Liquidity challenges hinder the Secretariat's ability to deliver on its mandates. This is due not only to delayed and undelivered pledges, but also to the fact that overall contributions are not nearly sufficient for the functioning of two major international mechanisms which have continued to deliver concrete results. The demanding and extensive work of the Secretariat can only be carried out under conditions that are supportive.

No long-term observers of the work of the Secretariat would dispute that the success of these instruments is largely due to the efforts of Convention Secretary Tea Aulavuo, who has carried the burden of the operations with extraordinary resilience and determination during her tenure. The delivery of the Secretariat's wide-ranging core tasks may well become unmanageable with the hoped-for expansion of the Convention to the global level.

The Espoo Convention and Protocol have been operating with noticeably less staff compared to similar UN multilateral environmental agreements. These instruments

suffer from remarkable constraints, including a lack of promotional resources. The Water Convention has the support of 17 professional staff members while the Convention and Protocol have one. Ad hoc sponsoring of personnel is unsustainable, as the temporary assignment of staff also impacts the ability to function.

It was pointed out at the last Working Party meeting that a large part of the [trust fund is for earmarked projects](#) and cannot be used for staffing, and that UN administrative regulations no longer allow the hiring of consultants to fulfil core Secretariat functions. The chronic budgetary deficits in the trust fund lead to ad hoc short-term fixes that are not solutions for filling the untenable staffing gap.

We encourage the Meeting of the Parties to consider exploring practical new measures for a sustainable, predictable and equitable funding scheme for the Convention and its Protocol. This might include: alternative mechanisms for pledging, comparable to other UN environmental conventions that have been successful in ensuring that their funding levels do not fluctuate; the preparation of an overview of the approaches of the other UNECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements which may also help in ensuring that resource requirements are met; a formal initiative to ensure at the very least a second institutional Secretariat.

Resourcing is a shared political responsibility. To ensure the functioning of the Secretariat we must seek, as a matter of urgency, ways of addressing this challenge for the sake of the continued effectiveness of the Espoo and SEA agreements. These depend on secure, sufficient and predictable funding.

Thank you for your consideration.

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