

Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention

Statement by Catarina, child environmental defender

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Hello, I am Catarina, a 16 year old global climate activist and child rights advocate, big waves surfer and student from Brazil.

In today's world we separate our planet into invisible boundaries, whether it is by the division of the ocean or by separating ourselves into continents. Though this is necessary for organization and logistics, it's important to point out that for issues, such as climate change, these boundaries are non-existent. Yet, when it comes to other issues, such as lack of basic sanitation, lack of basic education and even the difficulty of access to international forums we see that there is a parcel of the population, coincidentally living in the global south, suffering more.

Furthermore, though it is seen that parties should implement the civil society participation with 3 main principles, it can be noticed that it lacks effective processes of implementation. For example, at SB58 it happened that sometimes the negotiation space was closed at the last second for civil society which prevented youth from participating. On the other hand, children and youth generally face the problem of mostly getting observer badges which excludes them from the negotiation space totally and inhibits their meaningful participation at international forums. There are diverse ways this could change, one of them is for national delegations to consult the public and especially children and youth beforehand and also have children and youth take part in negotiations. Norway is a great example of this, as they have youth members in the national delegation to COP which gives space for them to meaningfully get involved.

When it comes to the participation of implementing the projects discussed on the forums, the first issue that happens is the promises not being kept or agreements being broken. This also involves transparency. If a nation commits to reaching a goal, then work towards it. Because as a youth and activist I can assure all that we are tired of broken promises, we don't want to hear what all want to do, we want to see what all are doing.

In addition, as a youth from the global south I have seen many problems to reach conferences, most times involving their visas, and consequently these problems are concentrated once again on the nations of the global south. Therefore I leave the question, how can there be public participation, when a part of the public that comes from countries that are usually most affected by world crisis, are not present?

Finally, I would like to emphasize the importance of involving children and youth on these international forums. Not as passive observers, but as active participants. The youth have things to say, show and argue, what we need are safe spaces where we are truly taken seriously, and at which what we say is not only listened to, but put into action.