



**ECOHOME**



# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

**CELEBRATING 25TH ANNIVERSARY**

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# INTRODUCTION

2021 has not been easy for us. Nevertheless, we have prepared an annual report covering our activity, because Ecohome has a story to tell. It was a pleasure for us to work on this report, knowing that even despite the difficult situation in Belarus, our wonderful team continued fondly to do our work in close cooperation with our partners.

The year 2021 is also important for us because Ecohome celebrated its 25th anniversary on 21 June (the summer solstice day). All this time we have been promoting ideas of sustainable development, helping Belarusians to solve environmental problems on their own, and proving that the right to a favourable environment is one of the key human rights. But most importantly, we have been doing the work we love with people who share our values.

In 2021, civil society organisations in Belarus faced unprecedented pressure and persecution from the current government. At least 550 organisations<sup>1</sup> were closed down or forced to initiate the dissolution voluntarily. This repression has also affected environmental NGOs: a number of their offices have been searched, some of our colleagues have been detained, and others are behind bars on trumped-up criminal charges and recognised as political prisoners.

On 26 July, it became known that the Ministry of Justice filed a closing-down suit against the Ecohome public association and on 31 August, the Supreme Court ruled to close down the organisation. We consider this decision unfounded, illegal and politically motivated. On 21 October, at the Meeting of the Parties of the Aarhus Convention, the closing-down of Ecohome was recognised

as persecution of the public for exercising their rights under the convention.

Some of our team members went through detentions and searches. Did this decision affect Ecohome's activities and the atmosphere in the team? Absolutely. But we keep up the good work and have not lost our spirit of stubbornness.



Here is what  
Ecohome was  
bound up in 2021

<sup>1</sup> Data as of February 2022. Monitoring is carried out by Lawtrend Legal Transformation Centre and OEEC: [undergoing compulsory closing-down; have decided to dissolve voluntarily.](#)

# WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

## WHO WE ARE

Ecohome was a legal entity until August 2021. The organisation was founded in 1996 to promote an environmentally compatible way of life and sustainable development.

Ecohome was one of the oldest non-profit environmental organisations in Belarus. It was created by a group of enthusiasts, activists and dreamers who shared the commitment to environmental principles and wanted to share their ideas with others.

## MISSION

Guided by the principles of sustainability and democracy, together with like-minded people, Ecohome strives to create a harmonious relationship in and around itself, at home, in the country, in the world, in the universe.

## WHAT WE DO AND WHY

Ecohome seeks a balance between nature and civilisation. We want to get to an understanding of the world and our place in it. In our work, we actively cooperate with other environmental (among other) public organisations, international structures, initiatives and activists.

## OUR ACTIVITY AREAS



LEGAL  
SERVICE



SUSTAINABLE  
ENERGY  
(RES VS NPP)



GREEN  
LINE



PERMACULTURE  
AND ORGANIC  
FARMING



CONTEMPORARY ART  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL  
ACTIVISM

# OUR 25-YEAR HISTORY

*“Ecohome will always exist because there will always be people who are not afraid to dream and do things that bring dreams closer to reality”.*

Environmental activist,  
Ecohome's supporter

*“I am grateful to your team for what you do and for taking care of everyone. Stay resilient and strong”.*

Activist of a Belarusian  
youth organisation

*“I am glad that such an organisation exists – its staff helped us during the protection of the Kotovka pocket park. I remember how courageously you acted in the park to protect the trees, how you taught us that there are things that do not depend on the authorities and that our initiative from below can be heard and implemented. Thank you for your trust and faith in people”.*

Minsk resident,  
collaborated with Ecohome

**To have a Home, to be a Home and to share a Home with all the good people, many years ago a group of dreamers and ecological life-stylers created the Ecohome public association.**



1991

Ecohome environmental initiative was created based on the Next Stop – New Life youth national organisation. In 1996, Ecohome was registered as a public association.

1996

Our team conducted the first international course on permaculture in Belarus<sup>1</sup>.

2000

Ecohome initiated the first forum of environmental NGOs.

2001

Ecohome started working on the implementation of the Aarhus Convention ratified by Belarus. The Aarhus Convention – the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. The long-term Ecohome's engagement with the convention made it possible to improve the legislation on public participation in environmental decision-making and access to environmental information, as well as the applicable case law in Belarus.

2006

Ecohome launches anti-nuclear activities responding to the plan of the nuclear power plant construction in Ostrovets (Grodno region). In 2008, we initiated the Belarusian Anti-Nuclear Campaign (BANC). Campaigners held debates and round-table discussions with scientists and carried out the first public environmental impact audit in Belarus;

Ecohome initiated the establishment of the Green Network – an association of environmental organisations.

2008

The NGO became an active member of the "Chernobyl Way" organising committee – the annual march dedicated to the Chernobyl accident anniversary.

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<sup>1</sup> Permaculture is a type of green design that helps to grow food, build homes and create communities with minimal environmental impact.

2010

Ecohome filed a lawsuit to the Ostrovets City Court demanding to provide information for public evaluation of the Belarusian NPP. This case became the first in the development of judicial remedies to protect environmental rights in Belarus<sup>1</sup>;

the first public environmental expert review (of the nuclear power plant construction project) was carried out in Belarus.

2011

A campaign was launched to protect the 40th October Revolution Anniversary Park in the centre of Minsk, in which locals, Ecohome and the Green Network took an active part. The administration of the city and the developer had planned to cut down a part of the park and construct a hotel for the World Hockey Championship in 2014. The trees could not be defended and the newly-built hotel was named Peking. However, the case was resonant and increased people's interest in the problem of development and destroying landscaped areas.

2014

Ecohome sent a Communication on Harassment of Anti-Nuclear Activists to the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee. It was this case that initiated the Aarhus Convention Rapid Response Mechanism in cases of harassment of environmental activists. One of the counts was the detention of Irina Sukhiy, Tatiana Novikova and Andrey Ozharovsky. They were going to hand over an open appeal to the Russian Embassy in Minsk to protest the signing of the framework contract for the NPP construction in Belarus;

Ecohome helped residents to win the case for the relocation of a pig farm planned for construction near the village of Moysichi (three kilometres from Molodechno), which exemplified the importance of public participation.

2016

Ecohome starts offering consultation to Minsk residents who live in the vicinity of the Kotovka pocket park. The park was to be partially cut down to make room for new a Catholic church. The locals and activists opposed that plan and even had to stay on 24-hour duty in the park. In the end, the construction was moved to another site. This high-profile and complicated case highlighted why development projects should be discussed at an early stage;

<sup>1</sup> Judicial remedies for environmental rights protection in Belarus in the last 10 years. Ecohome review [https://ecohome.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Obzor-sudebnoj-praktiki\\_30.06.2020.pdf](https://ecohome.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Obzor-sudebnoj-praktiki_30.06.2020.pdf)

saw the launch of the Green Line – a hotline to address environmental issues. The idea of the service was to give people advice and tools to solve environmental problems on their own, rather than provide ready-made solutions.

2017

Ostrovets of Culture exhibition was organised, in which artists, environmentalists and architects presented their vision of the future fate of the unfinished nuclear power plant in Ostrovets. They appropriated the body of the Ostrovets NPP and created the possibility of another future.

2018

Our team prepared a Scenario of Energy [R]Evolution in Belarus: Transition to 100% Renewable Energy in the Country.

2021

Ecohome, the oldest environmental organisation in Belarus, marked its 25th anniversary;

Ecohome public association was closed down by the decision of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus. Before the closing down, searches were conducted in the homes of Iryna Sukhiy, the organisation's Board member, and Maryna Dubina, the NGO's director. The Ministry of Information restricted access to Ecohome's old website [ecohome-ngo.by](http://ecohome-ngo.by);

at the seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention, closing down of Ecohome was qualified as persecution and harassment of environmental NGOs. Belarus was recommended to reinstate Ecohome.

**For all these 25 years we have been doing our work relying on your help and support. We are grateful to organisations, independent media, activists, our fellow environmental NGOs, experts, each and every one of you. Our activities, like our history, would not exist without you!**



# GREEN LINE

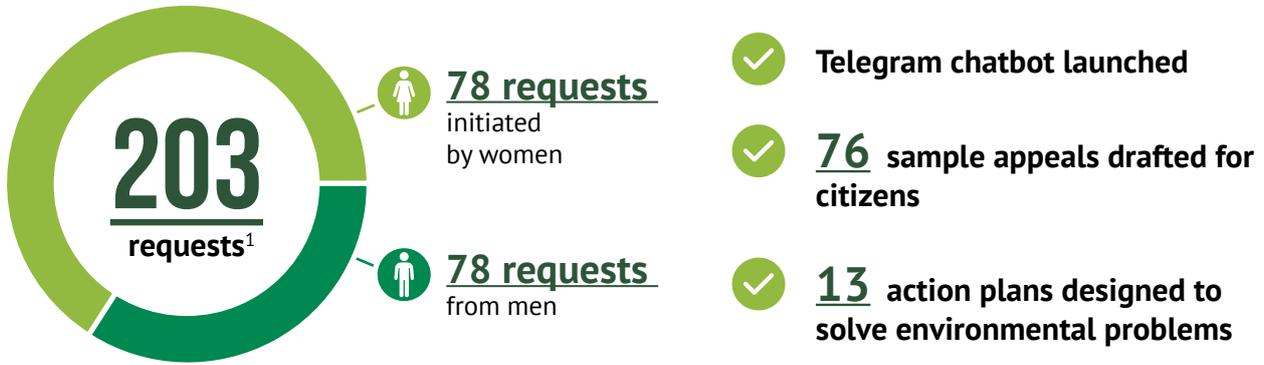
## AIM AND DESCRIPTION

Green Line is a service that helps people solve local environmental problems themselves. Green Line provides information support to advice-seekers. Rather than solving problems for them, operators offer an action plan: which agency they or their pressure group should contact, what rights the current legislation grants to citizens,

and whether there are associations that can help deal with environmental problems.

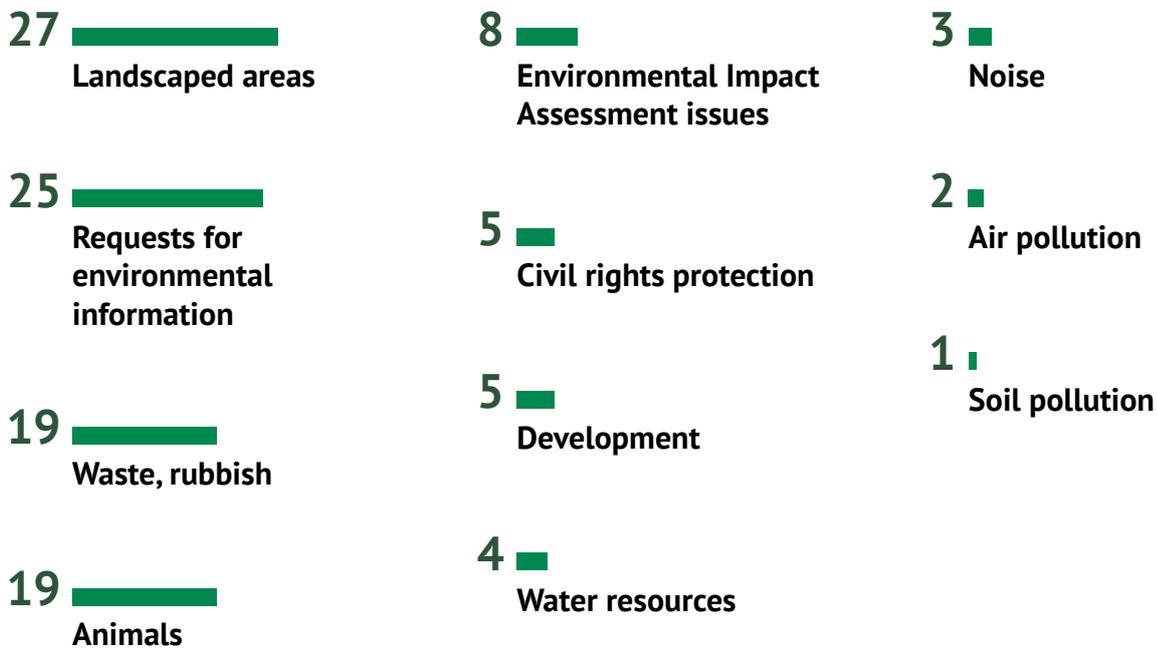
When necessary, the service operators also assist in correctly drafting appeals to state agencies that are effective in eliciting a more detailed reply from the authorities instead of another runaround.





<sup>1</sup> The total number of contacts: new and repeated.

## What issues have we been contacted about in 2021?



About half of the Green Line callers in 2021 are those who have already asked for advice before. This year, most of the cases were operational, i.e. the callers did not just report events but were actively involved in their further development. The year 2021 showed that people can solve problems themselves at the level of their communities and neighbourhood initiatives.

For example, relying on the support of the Green Line operators, Nesvizh residents (Minsk region) were able to force the

authorities to give up on [a pharmaceutical plant expansion plan](#). The residents of the village of Lopatino (Gomel region) succeeded in ensuring that the industrial waste-processing site next to their homes was no longer in use.

The situation in Tsentralnaya Street in Minsk, where 135 trees and 358 bushes were to be cut because of the construction of a heating main, was also successfully resolved. Thanks to the active engagement of the locals and support of the Green Line

legal experts, the district administration [cooperated](#) and accepted the citizens' proposal to change the heating main reconstruction project, saving most of the trees from being cut down.



In 2021, our team launched a [chatbot](#) to help solve environmental problems.

The chatbot operates on Telegram and answers questions related to environmental issues. Among other things, it will tell you if you can plant a tree in your city, where to dispose of an old thermometer (and other waste items), how to check water quality, and so on. The chatbot advises on acting competently and legally to make our living space better and more comfortable.

✓ **Based on the Green Line operation experience in 2021, we have also developed new [action plans](#) for solving environmental problems, which we have conveniently categorised by sections on our website:**

- I want to organise separate waste collection (plastic, glass, paper).
- How to handle an injured bird? How to help an unknown bird?
- How to prevent improper pruning?
- What to do if a public hearing has taken place and you have just learned about upcoming changes in your locality?
- The project has been put up for public hearing. The locals are strongly against the construction
- When are public hearings held in the form of informing individuals and entities and analysing public opinion?
- When are public hearings held in the form of a committee meeting?
- What are the forms of a public hearing?

**Currently, anyone can find the necessary action plan by exploring a special section of our website. There you can also download various appeal and request templates.**



# LEGAL SERVICE

## AIM AND DESCRIPTION

It is important to us that everyone can exercise their right to a favourable environment, have the tools to participate in making environmentally relevant decisions, receive up-to-date information on the state of the environment and have the opportunity to defend their rights. Since the legal service was established, we have

handled more than 500 cases throughout Belarus and more than 60 court cases.

Moreover, we analyse case history in the field of environmental rights protection in Belarus and prepare analyses on public participation in solving environmental problems and access to information.

- ✓ The [section](#) on public participation in environmental decision-making was created on the Ecohome website;
- ✓ The review "[On the Aarhus Convention implementation in Belarus in 2017-2021](#)" was prepared dedicated to the situation with compliance with the Aarhus Convention and the right to a favourable environment in Belarus;
- ✓ Ecohome submitted [Comments to the National Report on the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in Belarus](#), which is put together every 4 years;
- ✓ A [survey](#) was conducted among citizens and organisations on the implementation of their right to a favourable environment;
- ✓ A survey was conducted identifying citizens' needs and proposals related to participation in public hearings, [recommendations to improve the organisation of public hearings](#) were developed based on the results;
- ✓ Together with the Human Library Centre, [recommendations](#) were developed on increasing accessibility of activities within public hearings that help to ensure the participation of people with disabilities, the elderly, parents of young children.

In 2021, the campaign to declare Pechersk Forest Park a nature reserve was a success. The campaign was run for more than 5 years by Mogilev's environmental community activists with the support of Ecohome's legal service lawyers.

In the spring, we conducted a **survey among citizens and organisations** on the implementation of their right to a favourable environment. As it turned out, most people do not participate in public hearings or take legal action to protect their rights. Many do not trust the judicial system at all. But residents are happy to participate in local activities – urban land improvement, planting trees and shrubs, organising separate waste collection and others. According to the surveyed, the most pressing problem is waste, particularly plastic. This is followed by the issues of clean air and water and landscaped areas. Global issues such as climate change or the spread of invasive species are also often mentioned.

We believe that if citizens are determined to fight for their green rights – to protect a park or stop waste from being dumped in a river – it is worth doing it right from the start. Unfortunately, some issues are not resolved precisely because of improperly drafted appeals. To solve these problems, we **have launched a new section** on our website, which contains all kinds of documents, appeal templates and action plans for participation in solving environmental issues in Belarus.

It is not the first year that we have been engaged in monitoring public hearings in the field of architecture and urban planning, as well as reports on environmental impact assessment (EIA) of planned activities. Ecohome's lawyers combined their experience of participation in hearings and providing legal advice to the population to prepare **recommendations** for public hearing organisers in the field of architectural and urban planning activities and EIA reports ("How to conduct public hearings").

Throughout the year, we also **monitored** and **reported** on the persecution of environmental activists and NGOs. The crackdown on civil society and repression of activists also affected the environmental sector. More than 55 environmental organisations were closed down or forced to dissolve voluntarily. It was important for us to collect this information, to make these cases visible in Belarus, as well as abroad, and to draw attention to them using various mechanisms.





# SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

## (RENEWABLE ENERGY VS

## NUCLEAR POWER ENGINEERING)

### AIM AND DESCRIPTION

The main goal of the campaign is nuclear-free development and transition to sustainable energy in Belarus and its neighbouring territories. We have been observing the construction of the Belarusian NPP and conducting an independent expert evaluation since 2009, as well as informing the international community about all violations.

The most high-profile and important "anti-nuclear" event in 2021 was the participation of our team and the Belarusian Anti-Nuclear Campaign (BANC) activists in the meeting preceding the issuance of the operating license for the first plant unit of Ostrovets NPP. The hearing was conducted following the Belarusian legislation, but in contradiction with the Aarhus Convention provisions. [Here](#) we provided a detailed description of what was wrong with these "hearings". In our opinion, the purpose of the event was purely to inform the public before issuing a license to operate Ostrovets NPP Plant Unit 1. The meeting did not involve any discussion.

Nevertheless, we did our best to make sure that event did not go unnoticed: we took an active part in the hearings and conveyed Ecohome's vision of the problem with issuing an operating license for the Ostrovets NPP site. Our experts also held

an online press conference to explain the essentiality of the hearings and Ecohome's expert position to Belarusians through the media.

In March 2021, we initiated an online briefing with the European Commission's Directorate-General specialising in energy issues. The event was organised in the context of an expert assessment by the European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group (ENSREG) in Belarus. Our goal was to convey to the commission the complexity of the political and economic situation in which nuclear power plants are launched, as well as to learn how to make information on the NPP operation available to the public. During the discussion, our experts found out that the stress test procedure only assesses natural disasters, long-term blackouts or complete failure of cooling and heat removal systems and the management of accidents and incidents, without checking the quality of construction and the plants themselves. Since the construction was not transparent and had many violations of national legislation and international agreements, it is impossible to claim that the nuclear power plant is safe based on stress tests. The responsibility for safety always lies with the national authorities. A comprehensive inspection of a nuclear power plant facility by a special independent

commission is necessary, but there is none at the moment.

The "**Chernobyl Week**", traditionally organised by Ecohome on the eve of the Chernobyl tragedy anniversary, was held on 19-25 April 2021. On the occasion of the 35th anniversary of the accident, we prepared several issue-related media products and events.

- ✓ We gave a curator's tour of the Chernobyl. The Sleeper Effect exhibition at the National Centre for Contemporary Arts;
- ✓ Together with 34mag.net, we prepared a "Nuclear Test" for everyone to test their knowledge about nuclear energy and nuclear power plants;
- ✓ We prepared an infographic "[Chernobyl in Figures: What We've Arrived at in 35 Years](#)";
- ✓ [A video clip](#) was made about how the nature of Chernobyl and nearby contaminated areas is recovering without human intervention.





# PROMOTION

# OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

## AIM AND DESCRIPTION

We need to present the topics we are working on, as well as other environmental issues, clearly and interestingly. We want as many Belarusians as possible to be aware of their responsibility for the common future, to understand that we all have a right to a favourable environment, and to be able to exercise it. To do this, we are active on our social media, prepare unique materials for the website, hold events and use creative methods to promote environmental topics. We want the latter to be heard and covered in the media.



- ✓ The "Soil, Air and Two Smoking Trunks" podcast was launched;
- ✓ 97 author's texts were published on the Ecohome's website;
- ✓ An [animation](#) was created that explains how to make life in a city comfortable for everyone. [4 more cool video clips](#) were produced;
- ✓ The educational mobile game Strazhegrad 2.0 was developed to teach about protecting a real city from environmental disasters;
- ✓ A [Telegram channel](#) and a sticker pack for the social media were created;
- ✓ "Eco-activism. Getting Started" online course was designed and launched.

In 2021, Ecohome launched its **podcast "Soil, Air and Two Smoking Trunks"** about environmental activism in Belarus. Members of different environmental organisations told about their projects, achievements and activities people can join. We prepared a total of 8 episodes that are available [here](#).

Ecohome has a long history of working with different initiatives and activists who stand up for their right to a favourable environment. To share experiences and success stories, at the end of the year we launched the **educational course "Eco-activism. Getting Started"**. Its main task is to teach activists to solve environmental problems, to show what tools are available for this, how to use them, how and in what conditions they work, to describe successful (or less so) cases of advocating environmental interests, to inspire people

by the experience of other initiatives. More than 50 applications were submitted for the course.

*"I got interested in the course because my city has a lot of different problems and the ecological situation is dramatic. I enrolled to get new knowledge and materials to be able to plan activities to improve the situation in the city. I liked the assignments, which allowed me to think, to take part in the process, discussions, drafting appeals and responses, rather than just consume information. It was important to hear the opinions of others, to learn about other people's experiences".*

Marina, one of the course participants

## ПОЧВА. ВОЗДУХ. ДВА СТВОЛА

НОВЫЕ ПОДКАСТЫ ЭКОДОМА

ПРО ЭКОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ АКТИВИЗМ

ПОСЛУШАЙ И ТЫ!



# CONTEMPORARY ART AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

## AIM AND DESCRIPTION

Contemporary art and ecology is a vibrant and daring area of activity at Ecohome. We involve artists in collaborative projects by providing a venue or through co-participation in actions, performances and exhibitions. We aim to provide a creative follow-up for our environmental campaigns, because, told in the right way,



stories cease to be boring or distant. They make you want to take action.

An important part of this work is holding annual thematic plein airs. Since 2012, through a series of plein airs and exhibitions, Ecohome, in cooperation with the Ÿ Gallery of Modern Art and young Belarusian curators, artists, environmentalists and activists, has sought to show the very essence of the concept "ecological", demonstrating the interconnectedness of everything. The 2021 plein air was held in August. The theme was a line from a song by the Aquarium band – **"The tenderness of water is more reliable than anything I know..."**

This year it was important for us to create a safe, resourceful space for activists and artists. In terms of content, it was decided, instead of designing an educational programme, to create an opportunity to go with the flow and conversation and to manifest the topics that are important to the participants, to see different perspectives on the moment in which we find ourselves.

For the organising team and the participants, this plein air was about being together – co-being. The aim was to spend a week together, to breathe out and breathe in, to rest in safety under the protection of forests and lakes. But also, to talk about the new challenges we now face.



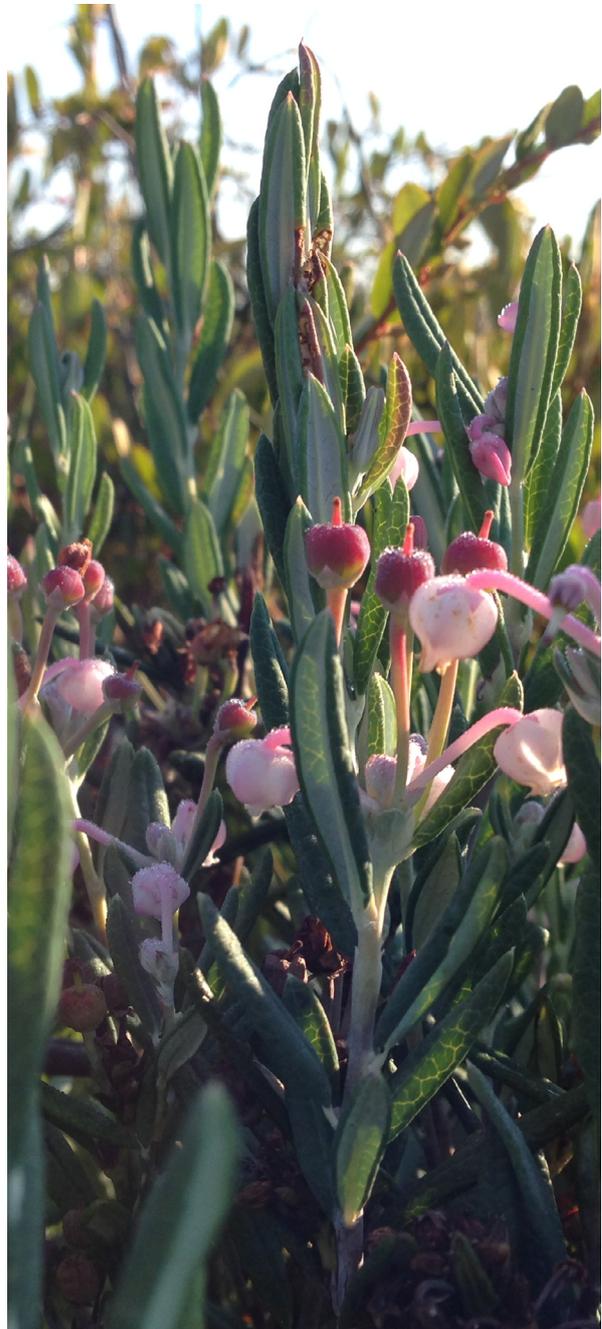
# PERMACULTURE

# AND ORGANIC FARMING

## AIM AND DESCRIPTION

Ecohome sees organic farming as an environmentally friendly alternative to conventional farming and as a way to improve the environment and the quality of life. Together with other organisations, we promote environmentally friendly farming practices in Belarus.

- ✓ **We have launched a series of educational webinars on organic agriculture for farmers, researchers, experts, specialists and decision-makers;**
- ✓ **An educational trip for Belarusian organic agriculture experts to Georgia was organised. The trip participants visited farms, got acquainted with the process, problems and achievements of organic certification, the history of Georgian farming activities, etc.**



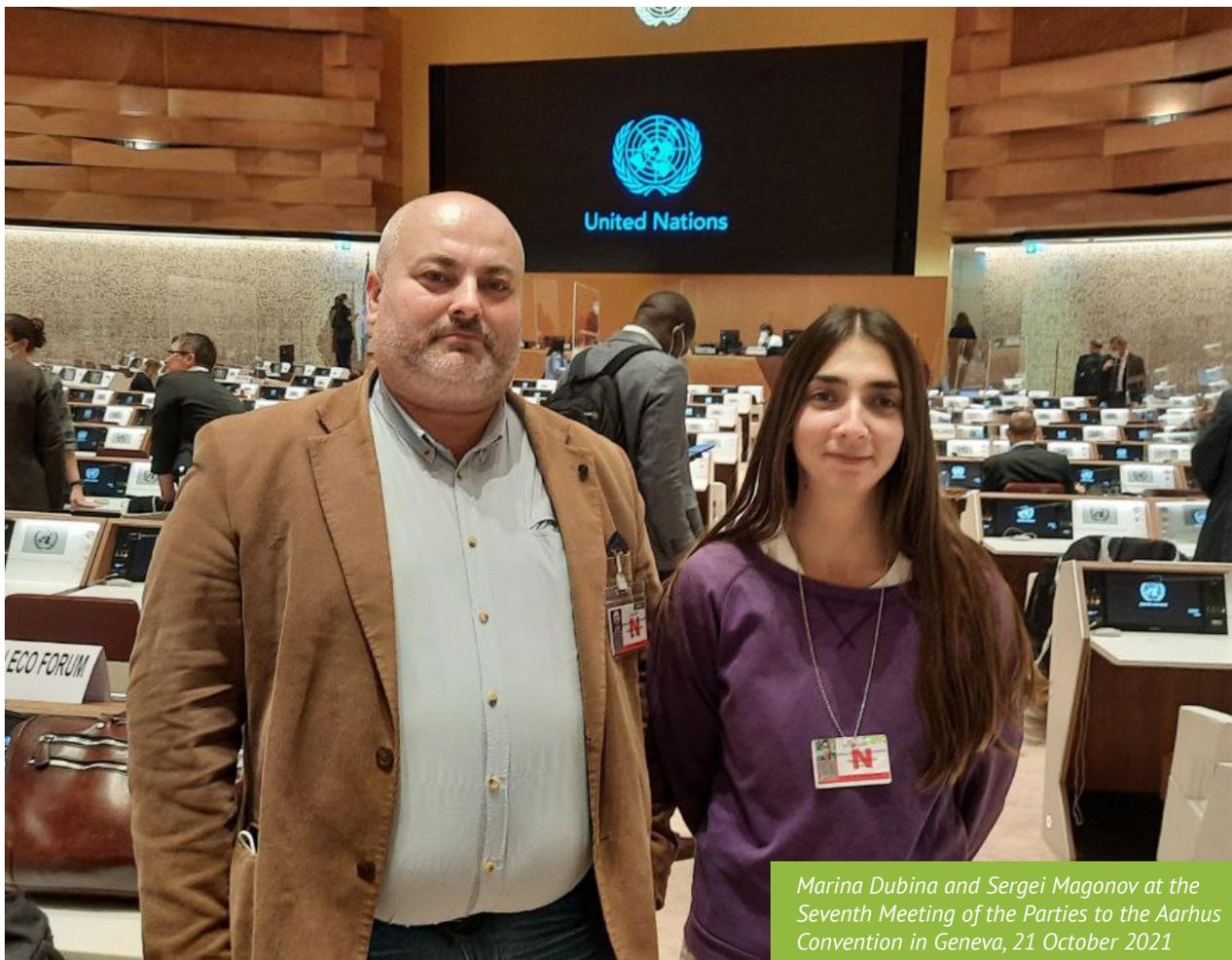


# INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITY

## AIM AND DESCRIPTION

For many years, Ecohome has been promoting the Aarhus Convention. Our experts have prepared submissions to the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee, including those concerning pressure on eco-activists. To promote our agenda, we use international mechanisms and cooperation with international partners.

On the occasion of the 65th Commission on the Status of Women, the EU delegation to the UN held a discussion called "**Protecting Planet and People: Voices of Environmental Women Human Rights Defenders**" on 17 March 2021. Five women from different parts of the world, whose work is significant for protecting people and the planet, spoke about tackling a wide range of environmental issues. One of the speakers was Irina Sukhiy, Ecohome's board member.



*Marina Dubina and Sergei Magonov at the Seventh Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention in Geneva, 21 October 2021*

✓ **In October, Ecohome members took part in two events preceding the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention:**

- Defending Defenders 2021: Protecting Environmental Activists from Harassment
- Practical Implementation of the Aarhus Convention: Civil Society Perspective

The most high-profile and really important event for us last year was the **7th Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention in Geneva**, where the parties to the convention recognised the closing-down of the Belarusian environmental organisation Ecohome as persecution and harassment of NGOs. This was the first time in the history of the Convention that one of the communicants of the Convention Compliance Committee was closed down.

The decision recognised the closing-down of Ecohome as a violation of the Aarhus Convention and provided for the suspension of special rights and privileges under the Convention for Belarus unless the country took steps to reinstate Ecohome by December 1, 2021. The suspension entered into force on 1 February 2022.

27 EU countries, Georgia, Iceland, Montenegro, Norway, Switzerland, Serbia and the UK voted for the decision. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia and Belarus voted against it.

*“The adoption of the decision on Belarus with its important conclusions and recommendations indeed shows commitment to the spirit of environmental democracy. And it is certainly important both for individuals and organisations, as well as for the promotion of the Convention principles. In this way, we recognise that the fate of those exercising environmental rights is of utmost importance and the convention contributes to their protection”.*

Marina Dubina,  
Ecohome director



# WHAT'S NEXT?

## OUR PLANS FOR 2022

We realised last year that it is challenging to make plans in our demanding times. Before all the events of 2020, we had developed a strategic vision, but it became clear that this was not relevant anymore. For this reason, in December 2021, our team set new organisational priorities for 2022. We are also now working in a rather tactical mode and prioritising activities based on people's needs and the situation.

We have often been asked about the closing-down of the organisation and our further work. Our team is unanimous about this: it is possible to close down a legal entity, but Ecohome is about people, ideas and activities. We will keep helping Belarusians to solve environmental problems by themselves, to promote the ideas of sustainable development, to prove through our daily work that the right to a favourable environment is one of the most important human rights.

**We would like to express gratitude to our colleagues, friends and partners, who have been by our side all these years!**



**Ecohome is all of us!**



**ECOHOME**

**You can find out more about our activities  
on our website and social media:**

[ecohome.ngo](http://ecohome.ngo)

[ecohome.by@gmail.com](mailto:ecohome.by@gmail.com)

