

**Ad-hoc open-ended working group (OEWG)
in view of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC)
on plastic pollution**

May 30th – June 1st 2022, Dakar, Senegal

Agenda item 3: Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters of meeting

EU+MS opening remarks

Chair, colleagues,

It is my pleasure to give some introductory remarks on behalf of the European Union and its 27 Member states.

First of all, I would like to thank UNEP and its Executive Director for convening this ad-hoc open-ended working group, as requested by UNEA resolution 5/14.

I would also like to warmly thank Senegal for hosting this meeting in this beautiful city of Dakar. But let me also express the deepest condolences from the European Union and its Member states to Senegal in relation to the terrible fire that led to the tragic death of 11 newborn babies in a hospital in Tivaouane.

Since UNEA-1 and over the years, we have seen a growing and global awareness of the challenges posed by the threat that constitutes plastic pollution. UNEP has played an important role in the recognition of this environmental emergency, especially through the work of the ad-hoc expert working group on marine litter and microplastics, and the publication of a number of policy and scientific reports, such as *From Pollution to Solution: a global assessment of marine litter and plastic pollution*, published in October 2021.

It is now impossible to ignore the fact that plastics are the largest, most harmful and most persistent fraction of marine litter, accounting for at least 85 per cent of total marine waste, and that emissions of plastic waste into aquatic ecosystems are projected to nearly triple by 2040 without meaningful action. However, plastics, including micro plastics, do not only leak into aquatic and marine ecosystems, but are found in all environmental compartments, as air and lands.

We should also keep in mind that extraction and processing of resources account for approximately a third of pollution impacts, half of global greenhouse gas

emissions and more than 90 per cent of global biodiversity loss and water stress impacts as mentioned in the IRP Global Resources Outlook 2019.

Hence, urgent action to address this challenge, throughout the whole plastic lifecycle is key.

The global consensus of UNEA that led to the start of the process towards a legally binding instrument was a first step. We now have a clear mandate: elaborating a new legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution with the ambitious goal of completing our work by the end of 2024.

Let's be honest: this is an ambitious goal. But, as the triple environmental crisis is upon us and the planetary limits are exceeded one by one, we do not have any further time to lose and we must redouble our efforts to make this goal a reality.

To do this, we need to agree on effective and realistic timetable, rules and organization of work in order to ensure that the negotiating process starts on the right foot.

That is what this OEWG is all about.

The EU and its Member States thank UNEP and its Secretariat for the preparation of working documents that are useful for further consideration during our meeting.

I would here like to share a couple of ideas and criterias that are key, in the view of the EU and its MS, for the success of this new INC process.

- First of all, and building on the experience from similar processes, including the INC on mercury, the EU and its MS consider that the INC will benefit from **a strong and effective governance**. We must elect a **Bureau** that will steer the whole process and ensure a smooth running of the negotiations. The composition of the INC Bureau should respect the principles of geographical and gender distribution. This Bureau will have to be solidly backed up by an adequately staffed **Secretariat** that will provide the necessary expertise and technical support for the smooth preparation and holding of committee meetings.
- In addition, of strong governing bodies, we must agree on a **realistic timetable** with sufficient negotiation time and effective use of the intersessional period from now on until the end of 2024. In addition, we should allow for sufficient time before each INC meeting for regional

coordination and consideration of the working documents that shall be shared with Member states well in advance.

- During these three days, we will also discuss the **organization of work and the clustering of our discussions** on an issue that is highly complex and multifaceted. It is the view of the EU and its MS that discussions need to be structured in a pragmatic way. We should also first consider to focus on overarching, strategic and institutional issues - such as the identification of objectives, scope and vision -, and to break down into more technical and substantive discussions later on in the process, in line with the UNEA mandate.
- We should give **leverage and flexibility** to the INC Bureau in conducting the work of the INC, notably by steering the process on the basis of the progress of discussions. This flexibility shall be granted to the INC process as a whole, in line with para 4(h) of the UNEA resolution, so that any other aspects that the INC may consider relevant can be addressed.
- The success of the negotiations will naturally depend on **adequate and sufficient funding of both the negotiation process and the INC Secretariat**. The EU and its MS therefore encourage all UN Member states in a position to do so to provide voluntary funding, including to make available resources for the participation of developing countries. We will do our part.

Lastly, the EU and its MS will be attentive that **active engagement from stakeholders**, such as the private sector and civil society, takes place as foreseen in the resolution 5/14 and will be able to contribute to in the development of this new instrument on plastic pollution.

Before concluding, let me EU and its MS' full solidarity with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. The EU condemns in the strongest possible terms Russia's unprovoked and unjustified act of aggression against Ukraine, which grossly violates international law and the UN Charter, and undermines international security and stability.

The EU demands that Russia immediately cease its military actions, withdraw all its troops from the entire territory of Ukraine and fully respect Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence within its internationally recognised borders.

At all times Russia must respect its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, including with respect to the protection of civilians, women and children. Russia also needs to stop its disinformation campaign and cyber-attacks.

Colleagues,

I will conclude by underlining once again how critical this OEWG is.

I am confident that we are up to the challenge that lies ahead of us are able to pave the way for constructive and effective negotiations to put an end to plastic pollution.

I thank you