

Brussels, 25 May 2022

## **Submission from the Workers and Trade Unions Major Group on the Ad hoc open-ended working group (OEWG) to prepare for the intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on plastic pollution<sup>1</sup>**

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The impacts of plastic production and pollution on the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature loss and pollution are a major catastrophe, with exposure to plastics harming human health, and potentially affecting fertility, hormonal, metabolic and neurological activity, while open burning of plastics contributes to air pollution. Plastic pollution of the land and water greatly impacts the sustainability of agriculture, livestock, aquaculture and fisheries; it represents a threat to the food security of the world population. It also destroys resort areas and destroys sustainable tourism opportunities.

The aim of the international legally binding agreement to end plastic pollution should be to support development of sustainable economies and sustainable food systems in both environmental and social senses.

Workers from many different sectors have the potential to be impacted by the future plastics treaty, especially as policies span the full life cycle of plastics. Marcos Orellana, the UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights, elaborates, “*Workers are one of the groups most exposed to the impacts of the plastics cycle.*”<sup>2</sup>

The negotiating mandate (UNEA Resolution 5/14) has the potential to serve as a turning point. For the first time in a UN environmental decision, the resolution recognizes the major role played by “*workers in informal and cooperative settings to the collecting, sorting, and recycling of plastics in many countries.*” It states that the INC is to consider, “[...] *lessons learned and best practices,*” including those from “*informal and cooperative settings.*”<sup>3</sup>

The Workers and Trade Union Major group insists that adequate measures need to be negotiated and stresses that meaningful participation of formal and informal workers – representing the full plastics life cycle – during the negotiations will open the door to a Just

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<sup>1</sup> The Workers and Trade Unions Major group acknowledges the valuable input received from CIEL and EIA: CIEL (2022) *Towards a Global Treaty to End Plastic Pollution: Ensuring Meaningful and Effective Stakeholder Involvement in the Intergovernmental Environmental Negotiations*’ and EIA (2022) *Initial Considerations for the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on the UNEA Resolution 5/14 to End Plastic Pollution: Towards a Legally Binding Global Instrument*’.

<sup>2</sup> Marcos Orellana, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes: *The stages of the plastics cycle and their impacts on human rights*, 33 and 110.b (2021), <https://bit.ly/3LgIWAt>

<sup>3</sup> End plastic pollution, UNEA Res 5/14.

Transition towards a sustainable society that ends the global scourge of plastic pollution.<sup>4</sup>

Recommendations for the OEWG:

- Provide clarity on the environmental objectives of the Legally Binding Instrument to End Plastic Pollution recognising the full lifecycle approach that is needed.
- National action plans to work towards prevention, reduction and elimination of plastic pollution should consider and integrate the impact on workers (formal and informal) in all stages of the plastic life cycle. This should be done through Social Dialogue processes at the national, regional and sector level.<sup>5</sup>
- All provisions regarding data-gathering, reporting and monitoring should include the impact on workers all along the value chain of plastics. This includes quantitative aspects (impact on the number of jobs) as well as qualitative aspects such as the type and quality of the jobs lost and created (formal or informal) through the proposed policies.
- A balanced and equal representation of stakeholders should be guaranteed in all stages of the negotiations as well as in the measures that are proposed. There should be an explicit recognition of the fact that some actors in the plastics supply chain have more means to participate and follow the negotiations than other actors such as the organisations representing the workers. Recognising and effectively dealing with this imbalance is an important factor that will enable a successful outcome of the negotiations.

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<sup>4</sup> More info on what is a Just Transition can be found here: <https://www.ituc-csi.org/just-transition-centre> and <https://www.ituc-csi.org/cepow-frontline>

<sup>5</sup> See International Labour Organization (ILO) for a definition of Social Dialogue: [https://www.ilo.org/ifpdial/areas-of-work/social-dialogue/lang--en/index.htm\)%20%20a](https://www.ilo.org/ifpdial/areas-of-work/social-dialogue/lang--en/index.htm)%20%20a)