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Date	January 13th, 2023

About Greenpeace International

Greenpeace is a network of independent organisations, which uses peaceful, creative confrontation to expose global environmental problems, and develop solutions for a green and peaceful future. Our goal is to ensure the ability of the earth to nurture life in all its diversity. Read more about Greenpeace’s values [here](#).

Summary

Plastic pollution is irreversible, drives biodiversity loss, and has devastating impacts on human life across its entire life-cycle. Scientific evidence supports the claim that the safe operating space for the ‘chemical pollution and novel entities’ planetary boundary (including plastic pollution) is already exceeded. Because over 99% of plastic is made from fossil fuels, with production only increasing, plastic is a significant and growing driver of climate change. Predicted expansion of plastic production, numbering into the hundreds of billions of dollars in new infrastructure investment, means that by 2060 annual greenhouse gas emissions from the plastics life-cycle are projected to more than double, to 4.3 Gt CO₂e.¹ Increasing plastic production will significantly exacerbate the already devastating impacts of plastic on human health, biodiversity and the climate, as acknowledged in UNEP/PP/INC.1/7.

Greenpeace contends that the plastic life-cycle begins at extraction because that is where the raw materials (mostly fossil fuels and fossil fuel derivatives) come from before they are turned into polymers to be then turned into plastic products. While solutions at all stages of the plastics life-cycle are required to end plastic pollution, a special emphasis must be placed on upstream solutions, as suggested in UNEP/PP/INC.1/7 Appendix VI. Negotiators must specify overarching objectives for the treaty that ensure the harm across the plastic life-cycle is addressed in terms that align with the [zero-waste hierarchy](#) (i.e. prioritising prevention at source), consistent with Operating Paragraph 3 of UNEP/EA.5/Res.14.

The Global Plastics Treaty must:

- End plastic pollution across the whole life-cycle to protect the environment and human health
- Phase out virgin plastic production
- Ensure a just and inclusive transition to a low-carbon, zero-waste, reuse-based economy



I. Substantive elements

1. Objective(s)

Greenpeace expects specific and ambitious objectives to be in the provisions/articles, and not only captured in the preambular text, of the final treaty in order to secure the level of ambition the plastic pollution crisis requires to be solved. We propose the following three objectives:

Proposed Objective 1:

- **End plastic pollution across the whole life-cycle to protect the environment and human health**

Explanatory Text 1:

This is aligned with many of the contributions at INC1 and takes into account that plastic pollution occurs across the entire life of plastic — including from extraction, production, transportation, incineration and dumping — and therefore control measures are required across the plastic life-cycle. This would also take into account the broader impacts of plastic on human health and human rights² (including, for example, through exposure to toxic chemicals and additives) and biodiversity across its life-cycle.

Proposed Objective 2:

- **Phase out virgin plastic production**

Explanatory Text 2:

There can be no ‘sustainable’ production of virgin plastic, with reference to UNEP/EA.5/Res.14 and UNEP/PP/INC.1/7. Current virgin plastic production locks in fossil fuel dependence, drives climate change² and biodiversity loss, and harms communities and workers living near production sites³. The treaty must therefore cap plastic production to a historical baseline, acting as an effective ban on new capacity, and begin a pathway of delivering a just transition away from virgin production capacity, leading to an eventual phase out. Obligations and control measures on plastics production will need to be accompanied by demand-side obligations and measures which reduce virgin plastic use and consumption.

Proposed Objective 3:

- **Ensure a just and inclusive transition to a low-carbon, zero-waste, reuse-based economy**

Explanatory Text 3:

Pollution from plastic production and use violates basic human rights, as acknowledged in UNEP/PP/INC.1/7 section D.3.67. The treaty must support a just transition to sustainable livelihoods for workers across the plastics supply chain, prioritising waste pickers and other affected communities in low and middle income countries; advance a rights-based approach that prioritises the interests of Indigenous Peoples and advance solutions that benefit from traditional knowledge; support new and/or

traditional reuse and repair product delivery systems and business models; and ensure fair and equitable representation throughout the negotiation, ratification and implementation process from communities disproportionately affected by the plastic pollution crisis.

2. Core obligations, control measures and voluntary approaches

Core obligations and control measures must require legal and administrative measures be adopted into national legislation that:

- Set a cap and establish phase down targets for virgin polymer production, with the cap set to a historic baseline.
- Eliminate subsidies for fossil fuels used for petrochemicals destined for virgin polymer production.
- Set targets to phase out all single-use applications of plastics.
- Ban formats and applications known to be highly problematic and unnecessary, such as flexible plastics and complex multi layered packaging (e.g. sachets). (See UNEP/PP/INC.1/7 Appendix II, sample actions for strategic goal 1.)
- Minimise use of plastic in other applications and sectors including but not limited to agricultural, fishing, aquaculture, other marine industries, textiles, and construction.
- Set legally binding reuse and refill targets across sectors.
- Introduce strict eco-design criteria for plastic, including design for durability, reusability and freedom from toxic additives.
- Establish a framework for monitoring, reporting, and full transparency on all plastics produced, used and/or consumed, imported and exported. (See UNEP/PP/INC.1/7, section E.)
- Establish harmonised definitions of ‘reduction’, ‘prevention’, ‘reuse’ and ‘circularity’ that provide clarity for industry and facilitate the best possible environmental outcome, building upon the work stated in UNEP/PP/INC.1/6.
- Ensure ongoing public participation in relevant processes from scientists, Indigenous and local communities, the informal sector, and young people across the world. (See UNEP/EA.5/Res.14, section 6.)
- Immediately eliminate known highly problematic polymers and chemicals. These include, but are not limited to, polyvinyl chloride (PVC), polystyrene (PS), polyurethane (PUR), polycarbonate (PC), polyfluorinated alkyl substances (PFAs).

Voluntary Approaches:

- This instrument must set globally binding controls on plastic, rather than relying on voluntary commitments.
- As the High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution Member States joint statement INC-1⁴ acknowledges, a patchwork of national, regional and voluntary approaches has been insufficient in addressing the problem.

II. Implementation elements

1. Implementation measures

Implementation measures must achieve the following elements:

- A just transition to more sustainable livelihoods for workers across the plastics supply chain, prioritising the informal waste sector and in otherwise affected communities in low and middle income countries.
- Support a rights-based approach that centres Indigenous Peoples⁵, and ensures affected workers and impacted communities are involved in the negotiation process and solutions. This reflects the call of the Peruvian government to establish a human-rights based approach to ensure the social and human impacts of plastic are addressed.
- Establish a new dedicated multilateral fund to ensure countries with the most resources and infrastructure support those with less, with mandatory, time-bound measures to ensure contributions.
- Ensure finance is allocated in line with the zero-waste hierarchy, prioritising reuse, return and refill infrastructure such as packaging return points, collection trucks, and wash facilities.
- Technological transfer and capacity-building that does not advance harmful false solutions such as chemical recycling, waste-to-energy, refuse-derived fuel, co-processing, or plastic credits. *Note: these approaches are ineffective^{6,7} and risk serious public health and ecological consequences for the communities where the facilities using these technologies are located.⁸*

III. Additional input

Greenpeace recommends that, at a minimum, the treaty establishes the following as *core principles* within its text:

- Zero waste hierarchy⁹
- Precautionary principle¹⁰
- Polluter pays principle¹¹, per UNEP/PP/INC.1/5 section B.4.12
- Prioritisation of traditional knowledge, per E/C.19/2019/5, p. 2.¹²
- Support a rights-based approach that centres Indigenous Peoples¹³
- Robust Public Participation and Transparency
- Common But Differentiated Responsibilities¹⁴

References

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(<https://www.unep.org/resources/pollution-solution-global-assessment-marine-litter-and-plastic-pollution>)
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6. GAIA. 2020. Chemical recycling: Distraction, not solution.
(https://www.noburn.org/wp-content/uploads/CR-Briefing_June-2020.pdf)
7. GAIA. 2022. Plastic Neutrality and Credit
(https://www.no-burn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/UNEA-publication-packet_plastic-credits.pdf)
8. GAIA. 2018. Facts about “waste-to-energy” incinerators.
(<https://www.no-burn.org/wp-content/uploads/GAIA-Facts-about-WTE-incinerators-Jan2018-1.pdf>)
9. Zero Waste Hierarchy and Hierarchy of Best Use 8.0, Zero Waste International Alliance
(<https://zwia.org/zwih/>).
10. The Precautionary Principle has been established in a number of international treaties (C. Gollier, N. Treich, in *Encyclopedia of Energy, Natural Resource, and Environmental Economics*, 2013) and is principle 15 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development
11. The Polluter Pays Principle is principle 16 of the Rio Declaration and is outlined in more detail here (<https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/4/4.en.pdf>)
12. E/C.19/2019/5, p. 2. The secretariat notes that the term used in resolution 5/14 is “traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems”
13. Common But Differentiated Responsibilities is a principle that was formalised in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change of Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, 1992. The CBDR principle is mentioned in UNFCCC article 3 paragraph 1., and article 4 paragraph 1