

Statement at the Third Meeting of the Ad-hoc Open-Ended Expert
Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics

18 -22 November 2019

Bangkok

Dear Chair ,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please allow me to extend my gratitude on behalf of the government of the State of Eritrea to countries and organizations that have made this meeting possible.

It is a founded fact that marine litter and microplastics have become serious challenges to the sustainability of the marine environment and the floras and faunas sheltered in it, and to human beings and other creatures that are directly or indirectly affected through food chains and other means.

Despite this truth, the attention given to marine litter and microplastics and the knowledge acquired on the impacts to marine organisms and human beings is minimal and incomplete. In this regard, the State of Eritrea welcomes the United Nations Environment Assembly's decision to establish this open-ended ad-hoc expert group with a mandate to enhance scientific awareness among experts, share experiences and help governments design, adopt, and execute policies and guidelines to alleviate these problems.

According to the Sixth Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6), almost all marine litters and microplastics are originated from land-based sources. This indicates that sustainable production and use of plastics and management of wastes can contribute a lot to the well-being of marine and terrestrial ecosystem.

While a complete and detailed scientific explanation regarding the impacts of marine litter is pending, it is time to urgently respond to known damages incurred from marine litter. Some of the measures that need to be taken to alleviate these problems can be summarized as follows:

- Introducing national laws that ban or discourage the production and use of specified plastic types and making sure of their strict enforcement;
- Making the production and use of plastics expensive. This can be attained through imposition of high taxes and tariffs to businesses involved in the production or importing of plastics.
- Encouraging businesses that produce or import decomposable products that substitute plastics. Support can be given in the way of tax and tariff exemption or reduction and through other mechanisms.
- Applying the polluter pays principle on plastic industries.
- Supporting plastic recycling factories and introducing affordable technologies.
- Raising public awareness about the environmental impacts of micorplastics.

- Adopting international legally binding instrument that regulates the production, trading and use of microplastics and management of their wastes.
- And others.

The aforementioned points are part of the solution towards a less-plastic world. However, taking into account deep penetration of plastics into our life and their affordability, governments and businesses may not find banning plastics economically feasible or easily substitutable. In this regard, effective waste management comes as best alternative.

The state of current waste management capability in developing countries is at its lowest level. The main reasons behind these are weak institutions, lack of enough resources and absence of appropriate infrastructure.

Cities and towns which are the main sources of plastic wastes in developing countries have poor tax, fines and charges collection system, which utterly undermines the capability of municipalities to collect, remove, and manage wastes. Rarely, when financial resources are not the main bottlenecks, lack of effective institutions and mismanagement makes proper service delivery difficult.

This shows that, the question of waste management cannot be separately addressed, and it can only be solved within comprehensive development framework of cities and towns.

When it comes to the practices and experiences of my country in fighting marine litter and microplastics; Eritrea has banned the production,

importation and use of plastic bags as early as 2002 at municipal level and in 2005 at national level. Indeed, this makes Eritrea the first country in Africa in passing a law that bans the use of plastics of specified type and putting in place effective enforcement mechanism.

Eritrea has also made grate efforts and achieved commendable results in raising awareness of the general public about the negative environmental and aesthetic consequences of using ultra-thin sing-use plastics. Today it is common to see Eritreans going to market places with bags made of cloth.

However, this is not without limitations. As neighbouring countries continue to legally use single-use plastic bags, some contrabandists import these products from neighbouring countries at small scale. This sends a message that without universal action against plastics, we will not achieve the desired results.

Therefore, it is my government's belief that these open-ended expert meetings finally will come-up with a proposal of scientific and policy solutions to the problem, and push forward to the universal banning of microplastics while affordable substitutes of plastics are sought after.

I thank you!