

Inuit Circumpolar Council – Statement 28 Nov 2022

First Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-1) meeting to negotiate a legally binding, global instrument on plastics

Thank you Mr Chair. We would like to congratulate you to your election, and thank Uruguay for hosting and the secretariat for the organization of the meeting.

I speak on behalf of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, which advocates for 180,000 Inuit across the circumpolar Arctic. The Arctic ecosystem, which provides sustenance and traditional foods to Inuit, is increasingly being contaminated. The source of contamination, such as a variety of chemicals, often arrive from the south. Plastics and microplastics have now made it up to the Arctic.

For this reason, the ICC is urging all countries to support a comprehensive, legally binding agreement on plastics. We want to see an instrument that includes the precautionary principle and addresses the full life cycle of plastics. This must include the reduction of sources, and address all transport pathways and associated issues, including micro plastics.

In terms of existing frameworks, both the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants can serve as examples. They also highlight the Arctic and Indigenous Peoples in the preamble of the treaty text. In the same way, a treaty on plastics should note the distinct vulnerabilities of Arctic ecosystems and Indigenous Peoples and their communities, since plastics are compounding existing chemical pollution threats, add to climate change impacts and biodiversity loss, and thereby to a diminishing of the integrity of the overall Arctic environment.

Consistent with international human rights law, the significant role of Indigenous Knowledge needs to be recognized and included in the treaty. There is precedent for such recognition in the Agreement to prevent unregulated high seas fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean where Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge are explicitly included.

There must be a human rights-based approach to global plastics management. To quote Marcos Orellana, the UN Special Rapporteur for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes:

“A human rights-based approach to global plastics management, focusing on human rights principles as well as mechanisms for accountability and access to remedy, is vital to ensuring that any global agreement on plastics is effective and legitimate. Human rights principles should be reflected not only in the architecture and text of the agreement, but also in the negotiation process.”

ICC hopes these suggestions will be incorporated in the design a comprehensive, legally binding global treaty on plastics. Inuit are ready to be a part of this vital work. Thank you.