

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. Since it is our first time speaking, we congratulate you to your election, 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 wants to see an instrument that includes the precautionary principle, addresses the full life cycle of plastics, and follows a human rights approach. An emphasis must be the reduction of sources. All transport pathways and associated issues, including microplastics, need to be addressed.

In terms of existing frameworks, both the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants can serve as examples. Both 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.

Monitoring of plastics in the environment needs to be included in the treaty text. To achieve a holistic understanding of plastics in the environment, it important to draw on the best available knowledge, **including Indigenous Knowledge** in monitoring activities. We have many existing monitoring frameworks and programs that need to be recognized in this regard.

For example, I am leading a community-led monitoring project in my home community of Nain, in Nunatsiavut, northern Canada. We work in partnership with scientists and ensure that Indigenous Knowledge is included in our work, together with science. This work is part of the Northern Contaminants Program in Canada, which contributes funds our work on contaminants and enables Inuit participation in these international discussions. We also contribute to Arctic Council's Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme, which has produced guidance on plastic monitoring in the Arctic.

We urge that 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.