As part of the many environmental justice delegates\(^1\) present at the first negotiating committee for the United Nations Global Plastics Treaty, we represent communities and environments directly affected by the entire lifecycle of plastic pollution: extraction, refining, creation, use and wastage. Our communities are mostly black, brown, indigenous, and poor communities. We have experiential knowledge of human rights violations and direct health effects of plastic pollution.

This intervention addresses the issues in waste management of plastics, specifically incineration and chemical recycling. Chemical recycling using pyrolysis, gasification, incineration, and waste to energy sacrifices human health and common-sense environmental protections for the benefit of industry profits. **These facilities should be nationally and globally regulated as incinerators and our regulatory agencies need to be better at addressing the ongoing pollution issues of facilities in the entire waste sector.**

Chemical recycling industries and technology that heat plastics to make fuel do not solve our plastic problem. Facilities like these require us to keep making plastics to use as fuel which directly harm reduction efforts to recycle, reduce, reuse and refuse. Many of the countries negotiating the United Nations Global Plastic Treaty already recognize that chemical recycling is not permitted in the process to address plastic pollution as it causes more harm to our air quality and there is not enough air emissions control and regulation.

As policy makers push industry to move away from fossil fuels and plastic, the future of the plastic-to-fuel industry is at best questionable and at most, a dangerous distraction from addressing the root cause of the world’s plastic waste crisis. The plastic “chemical

\(^1\)https://www.breakfreefromplastic.org/2022/12/01/bffp-us-ej-delegation-statement-on-the-global-plastics-treaty-inc-1-negotiations/
“recycling” industry has struggled with decades of technological difficulties; poses an unnecessary risk to the environment and public health; and poses a financially risky future that is incompatible with a climate safe future and circular economy. A report from Reuters in 2021 found that only about 20% of proposed facilities are operational, with the majority shutting down or being canceled despite tens of millions of dollars in funding.²

These facilities use incineration processes to break down plastic waste. Research from GAIA confirms that these facilities are in actuality waste-to-toxic oil plants, processing plastic to turn it into a polluting fuel that creates heavy pollution and distressing health issues in nearby communities like mine. In 2022, Natural Resources Defense Council found that most of these facilities “are not recycling any plastic; generate large quantities of hazardous waste; and release hazardous air pollutants.”³

The NRDC states that pyrolysis and gasification release chemicals known or suspected to cause cancer, neurological damage, or other serious health effects like birth defects – and most are cited in communities that are disproportionately Black, Indigenous, and low-income.

No matter our race, income, or geological location, government regulators are tasked with protecting the health of all residents. I close by urging the member states of this treaty to oppose chemical recycling, pyrolysis, gasification, incineration, and waste to energy, and place the human rights to health and wellbeing of communities above the profits of the plastics industry.

Thank you for your attention.

---