UNEP Ad Hoc Open Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics

IPEN Intervention on behalf of 6 major groups.

Date: Wednesday, 30 May 2018

Plenary Session: Item 6: Environmental, social and economic costs and benefits of the different response options.

Thank you, Madam Co-Chair,
I represent the NGO International POPs Elimination Network, IPEN, a global network of public interest organizations working for a toxics-free future in more than 100 countries. And I speak on behalf of 6 major groups - Women, NGO, Children & Youth, Farmers, Indigenous Peoples, and Science & Technology.

We appreciate the discussion paper, prepared by the secretariat and would like to specifically highlight the need to include the costs and benefits of marine plastics' impact on human health and wildlife, in the cost/benefit analysis of the various options discussed.

I came from the region of the Baltic Sea, which has been subjected to various contaminants for over a hundred years and is often referred as the most polluted sea in the world. The consequences of pollution have not been left unnoticed: for example PCBs and DDTs caused serious declines in seal and sea eagle populations in 1970s and caused significant human health impacts.

The possible toxicological responses caused by plastic can be a combination of chemicals associated with plastics, including additives, byproducts of manufacturing and chemicals absorbed from the environment. Some of these chemicals are defined as priority pollutants, which are regulated by governmental agencies because of their toxicity or persistence in organisms and food webs. These chemicals include heavy metals, pesticides, PCBs, BPA, phthalates and others, which can disrupt important physiological processes of humans and animals causing for example diseases and problems in reproduction.

The concentrations of various monomers and additives, such as BPA, PBDEs and phthalates are reported to be high in marine plastics. Therefore the plastic litter may serve as a pathway for hazardous chemicals to biota and human.

Most of the studies so far have assessed the fate and impacts of plastics and their leachates or adsorbed contaminants as a whole without being able to separate the effects caused by individual substances, or on the contrary, examined only the influences of one specific substance without taking into account the chemical cocktail present in the material. While this points to the need for additional research on specific aspects of plastic health and environmental impacts, we also believe that existing research provides sufficient evidence of harm to support the need to take immediate actions.

We therefore urge participants to consider immediate and ambitious actions and to consider the full health and social impacts of plastics and associated toxic substances when designing such response.