

# NGO MG Opening Statement for INC-1

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NGO Major Group

Thank you, Chair, and good afternoon Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, dear Colleagues, Ladies, Gentlemen, and all Gentlepersons.

I represent COARE – The Center for Oceanic Awareness, Research, and Education, and I have the honor this afternoon to address you on behalf of the NGO Major Group.

We would first like to thank the Government of Uruguay for its hospitality in hosting this meeting.

What an amazing time this is! We have the opportunity to change the world for the better.

Looking around the room, we see many familiar faces – people who have been dedicated to these discussions for years. We have come a long way, and we have learned so much. Our understanding of plastic – and its polluting impacts on the environment, climate, human rights, and human health – has evolved greatly over the years, and has led us to these negotiations.

One of the things that has become ever more painfully clear is that we do not have time to waste. We are currently producing more than 400 million tons of plastics per year, and we are *already* drowning in plastic pollution of all kinds. And that production is planned to *double* or even *triple* to many hundreds of millions of tons per year. The scale of this production is *already* producing an urgent crisis, a common concern of humankind, and our very future hangs in the balance of these proceedings.

Let's be honest: 99 percent of what goes into plastic is fossil fuels; plastics are essentially fossil fuel in a different format, and we can NOT address plastic *pollution* without addressing plastic ***production***.

We must put limitations on the amount of plastics being produced, because we are already drowning.

While urgent action is needed, there is no quick fix. Rather, the ambition of mandatory provisions and obligations is something that we should work towards – something that will require uncomfortable levels of effort and whole systems change. If this was easy, we would have already done it.

The fact is that our society is overflowing with plastic, and we have allowed this to happen. It is more than just an indulgence, however – this is literally killing people.

A clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is a recognized human right – and a right for **all**, not just a privilege for some.

Dr. Marcos Orellana, UN Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights has noted that there are human rights infringements across the entire lifecycle of plastic, and we've seen and heard that these effects are most dire for vulnerable populations.

Industry must STOP producing toxic materials and STOP using toxicants in the production of plastics. We NEED transparency so that we can identify and avoid hazardous substances and additives, not only in the production and use of materials and products, but also in their reuse, disposal, and end of life. There is absolutely no room for circularity when potentially poisonous substances are hidden in the waste stream.

Innovation will most certainly be necessary as we pursue a future free of plastic pollution. However, innovation should include scalable systems of re-use and refilling, for example, and not simply new ways to try to sell us old ideas.

There is no room and no time for false solutions like so-called advanced recycling and chemical recycling in this process. These terms are just a fancy way to mask the burning of plastic, and they cannot meet the scale of the *onslaught* of plastics production we are facing.

With the very industry creating plastic and plastic pollution weighing in so strongly regarding the discussion of possible solutions, industry's self-serving interest is painfully obvious.

We can no longer continue to put profit before the planet. . . and we can no longer continue to put profit before *people*.

In order to consider, develop, explore, and begin deploying truly effective and encompassing solutions, entities and individuals who profit from the very harms we are all suffering should not be part of the process.

Previous processes on the environment, such as climate change, leave civil society tired of empty promises and goals that have not been met. The plastic pollution treaty must establish the global rules, regulations, and support mechanisms needed to end plastic pollution and its harmful effects on the environment, animals, human health, and vulnerable communities.

We will judge the treaty not by what it promises, but by what it actually does.