

NGO MG Opening Statement for INC-1

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NGO Major Group

Thank you Mr./Madame President, 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 literally 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 collective and individual understanding of plastic pollution – and its 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. Plastic pollution is, indeed, a crisis, a common concern of humankind, and our future hangs in the balance of these proceedings.

While our urgent action is needed, that does not mean that we should set our sights low for the perceived satisfaction of a quick fix. Rather, ambition is something that we should work towards – something that will require effort, perhaps even be uncomfortable. 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 more 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 so-called chemical recycling in this process. These are appealing terms, but they are just a fancy way to say burning plastic.

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.

An often raised concern for global coordination is that one size does not fit all. However, we are not all trying to wear each others' shoes. Rather, we are simply looking for an umbrella - the best umbrella - which we can all use to inform, guide, encourage, and inspire regional, national, and local action plans to help protect human rights in an equitable way.

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, human health, and vulnerable communities.

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