

Trash Hero World

Thank you Mr Chairman. My name is Swathi Seshadri, and I work with communities in the frontline of the petrochemicals buildout in India. My country is ranked 6th in the world and 4th in Asia in global sales of chemicals. Our refineries located on the coast dump untreated emissions into our water, air and soil to the detriment of an already sensitive marine ecology. Falling fish yields and destruction of thousands of hectares of standing crop mean that the livelihoods of fishers and farmers are affected.

Health impacts of these polymer producing facilities cannot be ignored. Tuberculosis, cancer, other respiratory and skin disorders are common among people living around these petrochemical producing facilities and workers in these factories. We suggest that the new instrument includes monitoring on the impact of plastic production on the health and human rights, in particular for communities surrounding petrochemical plants.

While these impacts of the petrochemical industry go unaddressed, our country is planning investments more than 3 times the current investment. Changes in the way these facilities are permitted, constructed, and allowed to export toxic resins to the world should of course be an essential part of a new legally binding instrument.

My country is also currently pursuing a policy which supports incineration of plastic waste in the form of waste-to-energy projects and burning in cement kilns. This is actively supported by the industry, including some of the corporations present here. These incinerators release dioxins, furans heavy metals, acid gases and particulates. The Global Plastics Treaty must proactively disincentive false solutions like incineration at the global level and require such policies at the national level as well.

It is critical that the member states recognise the upstream impacts of the petrochemical industries while defining and addressing plastic pollution. We are concerned that several member states are peddling the narrative that plastics are needed for the growth of developing countries. However, a fossil fuel based development will not result in more children going to school, increased dignified employment or better health and social parameters. Instead, by supporting continued virgin plastics production and use, we are supporting increased toxicity and destruction of resilient livelihoods, and causing people to spend more on medical bills rather than on nutrition. We urge the leaders of the world present here to recognise this and ensure stringent measures to regulate at the global level the upstream part of the plastics lifespan.

Finally, developed countries have been exporting harmful material and technologies to the developing countries in the Asia Pacific region including incineration technology and crude oil for us to refine on behalf of all of you. We cannot be the dumping ground for the world - not for your waste to be incinerated using technologies you have declared unfit for yourselves and to produce petrochemicals for you while our lungs choke. This form of resource colonialism must stop!