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Ministerial Conference on Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution: 1-2 September 2021

Concerns over the rising tide of marine litter and plastic pollution have been increasing in recent years, as signs of a growing plastic pollution crisis have become ever more visible to experts and laypersons alike. Driven by uncontrolled production and consumption, plastic debris and marine litter are clogging waterways and washing up on beaches around the world. Plastic pollution threatens the health of both humans and wildlife, and is harming ecosystems globally. This growing crisis also has significant economic implications, particularly for those who rely on the marine environment and its resources for their livelihoods. In response to increasing calls for collective action at the global level, the governments of Ecuador, Germany, Ghana, and Viet Nam co-convoked the Ministerial Conference on Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution under the auspices of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

One of the main goals of the Conference was to build on the momentum created by various international discussions and make concrete suggestions to address the issue at the resumed fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2) in February 2022. To this end, delegates spent most of the meeting discussing a draft ministerial statement. This statement, developed by the conference conveners, sets out the problem and calls on UNEA to establish an intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) towards a new global agreement. Delegations have until 15 October 2021 to express support for the ministerial statement, which will then be forwarded to UNEA-5.2.

At the Conference, delegates also engaged in a high-level dialogue where they outlined local, national, and regional efforts to combat marine litter and plastic pollution. Many used this opportunity to underscore the urgency of this challenge and the need to fill gaps in the existing governance framework for related issues.

Delegates attending the Conference convened from 1-2 September 2021 both in-person at the headquarters of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva, Switzerland, and online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Conference was preceded by two preparatory meetings, held online from 27-28 May and 28-29 June 2021.

Brief History

Global concerns about litter in the marine environment have been on the rise for several years. Studies show that between 8-12 million tonnes of plastic pollution leak into the ocean each year. This number is expected to more than triple by 2050. Some experts estimate that, if the world continues on its current trajectory, more plastic than fish will be in the ocean by 2050. Studies have linked unsustainable production and consumption patterns to mounting plastic pollution, which impacts human health as well as the health of terrestrial and marine ecosystems.



Photo courtesy of **Tim Mossholder**

Origins of the Ministerial Conference

In response to these concerns, UNEA passed a number of resolutions to discuss the best ways to address the issue. Specifically, UNEA resolution 3/7 established an *Ad Hoc* Expert Group (AHEG) on marine litter and microplastics to identify, *inter alia*: the range of national, regional, and international response options, including actions and innovative approaches and voluntary and legally binding governance strategies and approaches; and environmental, social, and economic costs and benefits of different response options. The AHEG met four times between 2018 and 2020.

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Peter Woodward, Conference Moderator

In parallel, several other bodies are also conducting work related to marine litter and microplastics, including: the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal (Basel Convention); the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management; the International Maritime Organization (IMO); the World Health Organization (WHO); the WTO; and various Regional Seas Programmes and Conventions. There are also numerous voluntary initiatives on marine litter, several public-private partnerships to address land-based sources of marine pollution, and other dialogues, which are considering plastic pollution. However, gaps in regulatory frameworks addressing marine litter and plastic pollution still remain.

Key Turning Points

AHEG-1: At the first AHEG meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, in May 2018, delegates exchanged views on barriers to combat marine litter and microplastics and considered the work of existing mechanisms addressing this issue. The option of establishing a new global governance structure was also raised.

AHEG-2: During the second AHEG meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland, in December 2018, the group convened two workshops to better understand elements related to information and monitoring and governance.

UNEA-4: At its fourth session, held in Nairobi, Kenya, in March 2019, UNEA extended the AHEG mandate until UNEA-5.

AHEG-3: At its third meeting, held in Bangkok, Thailand, in December 2019, the AHEG requested the Secretariat to produce reports on the financial and technical resources and mechanisms to address the issue, as well as on partnerships.

AHEG-4: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, AHEG-4 met virtually in November 2020. The Group concluded its work, agreeing to forward a Chair's Summary to UNEA-5. The Summary contained, *inter alia*, a non-exhaustive list of recommendations for future action on marine litter and microplastics. It reflected a growing consensus to address plastic pollution more broadly. Some of the recommendations included strengthening existing instruments, including voluntary measures, and calling for UNEA to establish an INC towards a new global agreement.

UNEA-5.1: The first part of UNEA-5 (UNEA-5.1) was held virtually in February 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Delegations highlighted national efforts to combat marine litter and plastic pollution. However, they postponed formal discussions on the issue until the resumed session of UNEA-5 in February 2022.

Ministerial Conference Pre-Meetings: To maintain political momentum on these issues, Ecuador, Germany, Ghana, and Viet Nam convened an informal, online process towards a Ministerial Conference that would clarify the mandate for formal discussions on marine litter and plastic pollution at UNEA-5.2. Participants met 27-28 May and 28-29 June 2021 to discuss the best way forward for the process, with many delegations favoring a new global agreement to holistically address the issue. The four co-convenors then drafted a ministerial statement for endorsement by the Ministerial Conference, highlighting the importance of establishing an INC.

Report of the Meeting

On Wednesday, 1 September, Peter Woodward, Conference Moderator, welcomed participants joining online or in-person at WTO headquarters.

Highlighting growing recognition among WTO members that the way we produce, consume, and dispose of plastics causes significant damage to the environment and human health, Jean-Marie Paugam, Deputy Director-General, WTO, said several members consider movement to a more circular economy to be essential. He outlined ongoing dialogue on how trade intersects with the plastic pollution challenge, underscoring that this is a "bridge building" issue between developed and developing countries.

Underscoring that measures to date have been insufficient to combat the scourge of plastic pollution and marine litter, Co-Convener Gustavo Manrique Miranda, Minister of Environment and Water, Ecuador, called for a coordinated global response that is ambitious, effective, and geared toward action. He highlighted the need to move toward a circular economy that is resilient and low carbon.

Co-Convener Regina Dube, German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, emphasized that marine litter and plastic pollution is a transboundary issue that can only be tackled with international cooperation and funding. She called for decisive steps toward establishing an INC during the resumed session of UNEA-5 in February 2022.

Co-Convener Ramses Joseph Cleland, Ghana, emphasized that his country has increased awareness regarding negative implications of plastic pollution and marine litter for economic development and health hazards. He called for a loud, clear, and convincing statement on these issues.

Rallying countries to support the establishment of an INC, Co-Convener Que Lam Nguyen, Administration of Sea and Islands, Viet Nam, drew attention to his country's legislation to strengthen the circular economy and to the creation of a public-private partnership to address plastic pollution.



Jean-Marie Paugam, Deputy Director-General, WTO



Peter Thomson, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean



Luisa Fragoso, Portugal, Co-Chair of the Nairobi Group of Friends

Susan Gardner, UNEP, emphasized that UNEP has heard stakeholders around the world calling for bold action at all levels, with system wide changes. She said UNEP will support, with enthusiasm, activities that bring governments and stakeholders together.

Recalling the multiple threats to the ocean, including those contained in the most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report and stating marine plastic pollution is one more sign of human's war on nature, Peter Thomson, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, expressed hope that this Conference would advance initiation of a process towards a robust international agreement to comprehensively address the issue.

Marcos Orellana, UN Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights, stressed that including human rights principles will be imperative for a legitimate outcome related to marine litter and plastic pollution. He also noted the importance of carefully assessing alternatives to avoid "optical illusion" solutions like recycling, open burning, and incineration, which are infeasible using currently available technology.

Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, underlined that action to address plastic pollution should build on existing measures like the plastics amendment and the Plastics Waste Partnership under the Basel Convention. He also highlighted the role of both the Stockholm and Rotterdam Conventions in addressing plastic pollution more holistically, drawing further attention to ongoing awareness-raising campaigns and training initiatives.

Update of Recent Progress on the Issue of Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution

On Wednesday, Leticia Carvalho, UNEP, drew attention to the evolution of discussions on the issue, noting the current focus on sources of plastic pollution. Highlighting the broad reach of the [Clean Seas campaign](#), she further noted partnerships with several UN entities to address marine litter and plastic pollution, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, the WTO, the WHO, and the Global Environment Facility.

Alejandra Guerra, Chile, Co-Chair of the Nairobi Group of Friends to Combat Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution, underscored this is a global transboundary problem that requires preventative upstream actions that deal with the entire lifecycle of plastics. She highlighted that overuse of single-use plastics is particularly troublesome and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. She said UNEA-5.2 represents a great opportunity for specific multilateral action.

Luisa Fragoso, Portugal, Co-Chair of the Nairobi Group of Friends, noted the group will advocate for coordinated solutions that address this problem holistically through a lifecycle approach. She said 2022 must be a year of action in the fight against marine litter and plastic pollution.

Walton Webson, Antigua and Barbuda, Co-Chair of the New York Group of Friends to Combat Marine Plastic Pollution, emphasized that while many international laws touch on the issue of marine litter and plastic pollution, they have not been effective in slowing the problem. He said this illustrates the need for a new global agreement.

Rhys Pogonoski, Australia, outlined related efforts taken by the Informal Dialogue on Plastics Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade. He emphasized the need to break down silos and take an inclusive, multi-stakeholder approach to solve this problem. He noted that since 2020, the group has addressed hidden flows of plastic, explored ways to collectively support least developed country solutions, and has undertaken extensive outreach to other WTO members.

Frederick Haag, IMO, said IMO member states acknowledge more can and should be done to address these issues. He highlighted, *inter alia*, the 2018 IMO action plan to address marine plastic litter from ships.

Amy Fraenkel, Executive Secretary, Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, highlighted new findings that migratory species could be the most vulnerable to plastic pollution. She noted the need for more information on the long-term impacts on the food system, human health, and the environment.

Via video message, Kosi Latu, Director-General, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, noted the region's growing support for a global treaty and highlighted long-term regional plans to combat plastic pollution in the marine environment.

Carsten Wachholz, Ellen MacArthur Foundation, drew attention to support for both a transition to a circular economy and a global treaty from business, financiers, philanthropists, and civil society.

Jacob Duer, President and CEO, Alliance to End Plastic Waste, underscored the need to address this challenge through scalable actions, with governments, businesses, and communities working together to address waste management, strengthen awareness and education, and promote clean-up activities. He highlighted the importance of innovative financing models and data to support implementation of a new agreement and pointed to [UNEP's Global Partnership on Marine Litter](#) as an important platform.

Outcomes of the Preparatory Meetings and Reflections on the Draft Ministerial Statement

Presentation of Key Takeaway Messages from Five Thematic Workstreams: Under this agenda item, which was addressed on Wednesday, delegates heard reports from five workstreams which convened during the two preparatory meetings, presented by the workstream co-facilitators.

Common goal, vision, and objectives of a potential global instrument: Co-Facilitator Pernilla Åhrlin, Sweden, reported that the discussion included the need for a new agreement to complement existing efforts and be based on strong science. She said participants called for a vision based on circularity that would address the full lifecycle of plastic, as well as include the polluter pays principle, the precautionary principle, and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

Co-Facilitator Ayub Macharia, Kenya, outlined discussions on the scope of the instrument, noting calls to focus on upstream measures and include bans on single-use plastics and plastic additives. Highlighting delegates' support for establishing an INC, he noted plastic pollution is not adequately addressed by other international instruments.

Data, monitoring, and reporting: Co-Facilitator Nanette Laure, Seychelles, also speaking for Co-Facilitator Vladimir Lenev, Russian Federation, said several participants highlighted the need for harmonized and standardized methodologies to facilitate better comparisons and scientific decision making. She further noted the importance of technical and financial assistance, capacity building, and technology transfer for least developed countries. She said implementation of a global monitoring system would help monitor plastics across their lifecycle. She concluded that our oceans are “very sick with plastic waste,” and said only when the right diagnosis and volume of damage are established will the right treatment be prescribed.

Measures to address marine litter and plastic pollution, including through a life cycle approach, and dialogue with industry and consumers: Co-Facilitator Asha Challenger, Antigua and Barbuda, also speaking for Co-Facilitator Hugo Schally, European Union (EU), said participants had: highlighted the need for deepened understanding of the lifecycle approach and its utility; emphasized the need for tailored measures rather than a “one size fits all” approach; and identified the need for technology transfer, capacity building, and financial support for developing countries. She noted a general view that a multidisciplinary, multi-stakeholder approach is required. She said the desired outcome of UNEA-5 is the establishment of an INC to prepare the text of an agreement for consideration at UNEA-6.

National and regional cooperation, coordination, and implementation: Co-Facilitator Larke Williams, United States (US), said delegates had discussed the ways in which countries can come together to work under a shared global vision. Williams reported that participants agreed the global instrument should strengthen national and regional actions, fill gaps not addressed by existing initiatives, and address the full lifecycle of plastics.

Co-Facilitator Agustín Harte, Argentina, added that delegates had highlighted the need to feed into discussions on related issues, such as biodiversity and climate change, and support existing mechanisms for addressing aspects of these issues to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication of efforts. He said participants also highlighted the need for incentives to promote a circular economy and the importance of developing new and better technologies to support recycling and reduce waste incineration. He concluded that some stakeholders want a legally binding agreement, while others prefer a blend of binding and voluntary provisions.

Financial and technical support: Co-Facilitator Julius Piercy, United Kingdom (UK), emphasized that financial support



Delegates during the first day of the Ministerial Conference on Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution

is crucial for developing countries and said many favored an instrument with a financial mechanism. He also noted that several participants highlighted the need to explore innovative financial mechanisms, including by harnessing private sector funding. He said several participants called for incorporating extended producer responsibility.

Co-Facilitator Cheryl Rita Kaur, Malaysia, said participants had emphasized the need to provide technical support for developing countries, as well as scientific advice. She highlighted the need to review the legal framework and ensure compliance with new committees. On waste management, she said participants emphasized the need to engage with informal waste collectors to move toward formalization of their work and provide them with better working conditions. She stressed the agreement should ensure significant upstream preventative action to reduce waste generation and provide guidance for development and implementation of criteria for plastic products.

General Reflections on the Draft Ministerial Statement:

Delegates shared their views on the ministerial statement on Wednesday, 1 September, and Thursday, 2 September. Opening the session, Co-Convener Oliver Boachie, Special Advisor to Ghana's Minister of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation, introduced the draft ministerial statement, noting it was developed by the co-convenors based on discussions held during the two preparatory meetings in May and June 2021. He highlighted that comments on the draft had already been received, and that discussions at this session would also be reflected in draft. Boachie said delegations would have until 15 October 2021 to sign the draft statement, which would then be forwarded to UNEA-5.2.

The EU supported establishing an INC towards a legally binding agreement on plastics and marine litter that would address upstream inputs and build on existing work. She called for a transparent, multi-stakeholder process, and underscored the importance of incentivizing industry to take responsibility for plastic pollution.

SWITZERLAND supported an inter-agency, multi-stakeholder approach to combatting plastic pollution and marine litter, calling for a comprehensive lifecycle approach with both voluntary and legally binding measures.

COLOMBIA, with BURKINA FASO, stressed the need to reflect that plastic pollution also adversely impacts terrestrial environments. In addition, COLOMBIA called for inclusion of a robust financial mechanism to assist developing countries implement the new agreement, stressing that the elimination of plastic pollution should be supported by measurable, time-bound targets.



Oliver Boachie, Special Advisor to Ghana's Minister of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation

The PHILIPPINES called for the new agreement to be legally binding and science based, and to consider the polluter pays principle and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities. He stressed it should not undermine existing measures, and should include financial assistance, technology transfer, and capacity-building measures.

LIBERIA stressed developed countries must take bigger steps to address the issue, noting the effects are already being experienced in vulnerable countries.

BELIZE called for collaborative, science-based action to address the problem, saying the agreement should take into account the precautionary principle and include measures to support monitoring, reporting and verification, capacity building, technology transfer, and financial assistance.

BRAZIL called for including the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, as well as measures to support financial assistance and technology transfer.

INDONESIA called for including language on capacity building and technology transfer, common but differentiated responsibilities, common methods and standards, science, and details on how to transition to a "plastic-less society."

Antigua and Barbuda, for the ALLIANCE OF SMALL ISLAND STATES, supported a new global agreement based on inclusive, multi-stakeholder negotiations, and stressed that the ministerial statement should not be prescriptive.

URUGUAY underscored the importance of common global actions and substantial changes in social behavior, emphasizing the existing legal basis for an international agreement.

JAPAN emphasized that, *inter alia*: existing measures to address marine litter and plastic pollution should be based on local and national circumstances; the lifecycle approach should be a priority; implementation measures under existing frameworks should continue in parallel; and wide participation, including of large plastics emitting and consuming countries, is essential to negotiations.

MALAYSIA called for clarification on the indicators of plastic pollution; strongly supported efforts to provide sufficient and predictable means of implementation for a future agreement; called for the establishment of a multilateral trust fund; and supported a phased elimination approach that accounts for individual capacities of countries.

QATAR proposed streamlining the statement in line with similar texts under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Montreal Protocol.

Underscoring that plastic pollution is a significant problem in Eastern Africa, ETHIOPIA said a global agreement should include shared vision, reduction targets, national action plans, monitoring and reporting, implementation, and scientific bodies.



Gabriela Nair Medina Amarante, Uruguay

ARGENTINA emphasized that any strategy to address these issues needs to be evidence-based and framed within the global vision of sustainable development, and said the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities must be reflected in the ministerial statement.

NORWAY supported the ministerial statement, noting that in recent discussions, delegations have converged on the need for a systematic approach to data and the need for financing.

Supporting a new international mechanism, SRI LANKA noted the sinking of the X-Press Pearl in May 2021 caused the death of charismatic marine creatures through exposure to oil, plastic nurdles, and chemicals; and called on the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) to recognize plastic nurdles as a high-level pollutant, similar to oil spills.

EGYPT called for an emphasis on technical cooperation, and not technology transfer, highlighting technology cooperation goes above technology donations, and involves technology exchange. He called for policy coherence and information to show the market opportunities fostered by transitioning away from plastic.

BANGLADESH, with several others, called for including, in the statement, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, technology transfer, financial assistance, and resource mobilization.

Supporting the ministerial statement, KENYA, GEORGIA, and the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO favored establishment of a time-bound INC at UNEA-5.2. SOMALIA favored an open-ended, inclusive INC. MADAGASCAR supported establishing an INC to negotiate an international legally binding instrument.

The SEYCHELLES said negotiations on a global agreement should include the voices of small island developing states, and, with NEPAL, called on developed countries to accept the responsibility of providing technology, financial support, and capacity to address marine plastic litter.

Pointing to the recently launched £500 million Blue Planet Fund, the UK supported the ministerial statement as a good start towards a global agreement.

The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC called for data and information on the issue to strengthen a global agreement and urged including the polluter pays principle and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

LIBYA called for a robust assessment of plastic production and highlighted the role of a potential new legally binding agreement in combatting single-use plastics.

Stressing the importance of a science-based approach, SINGAPORE underlined that plastic pollution is a product of



Mohamed Ibrahim Elmi, Kenya

poor waste management, lamenting the ministerial statement frames the issue as one of production and not of waste.

Explaining that his country has not yet developed its internal position on this issue, the US announced they would not be in a position to sign the ministerial statement but anticipated further discussions at UNEA-5.2.

Underlining that UNEP should continue to lead in developing and implementing measures to address the issue, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION said the discussions will help consolidate the broad support to address marine litter and plastic pollution. He said such discussions should take place at UNEP headquarters.

Calling attention to the circumstances of states under occupation, PALESTINE called for harmonizing the terminology on marine litter and plastic pollution in the ministerial statement, and to include stronger reference to sustainable financial assistance, technology transfer, and capacity building.

MEXICO stated that addressing the issue requires a comprehensive, structural transition to circularity and long-term sustainable development, and supported others calling for data and science to drive action.

Stressing that detailed discussions should be held at UNEA-5.2, CHINA joined the calls to solve marine plastic pollution, noting the use of plastic in many sectors necessitates a comprehensive approach.

SIERRA LEONE pointed to links between plastic pollution and climate change, stressing the new agreement should address single-use plastics to reduce flooding incidents.

The CENTER FOR OCEANIC AWARENESS RESEARCH AND EDUCATION stressed that the new agreement should be legally binding, take a human-rights based approach, and assess alternatives and solutions with caution.

The WORLD WIDE FUND FOR NATURE (WWF) called on states to endorse the ministerial statement, underlining the urgency of the crisis.

The SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY MAJOR GROUP supported the new agreement addressing the full lifecycle of plastic and called for it to include a scientific body and a clearing house, which could help bridge the knowledge-action gap.

Welcoming the ministerial statement, the BALTIC MARINE ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION COMMISSION shared member states' actions to address marine plastic litter, specifically noting the importance of collaborating with other regional seas agreements.

Calling for plastic pollution to be classified as a common concern for humankind, the CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAW said the statement should include



Rosa Otero, Dominican Republic

measures to restrict and ban plastic additives and impose registration requirements for certain types of polymers.

The Youth Constituency of the UNFCCC (YOUNGO) supported the inclusion of financial assistance, technology transfer, and capacity building in the statement; proposed strengthening linkages with the UNFCCC; and called for an inclusive negotiating process.

The WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP suggested the statement also include reference to the toxicity of plastic to women and children, the negative health impacts of plasticizers, and the impact of plastic waste on the human rights of women workers.

Supporting the proposal for a new treaty, NESTLE pointed to the [Ocean Plastic Leadership Dialogue](#), which focuses attention on national actions to address the issue.

PLASTICSEUROPE said limiting plastic production without considering the production and consumption impacts of all other materials will lead to adverse effects, including an increase in greenhouse gas emissions.

WOMEN ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME highlighted the gender dimensions of plastic pollution in Nigeria, lamenting that some developed countries are pushing African countries to weaken national plastic waste import laws.

Steps in the Lead-up to UNEA-5.2

On Thursday, 2 September, UNEA-5 President Sveinung Rotevatn, Norway, via video message, expressed his gratitude for the level of engagement in maintaining momentum on this issue; noted convergence on issues such as the lifecycle approach to managing plastic and the need for a global agreement; and called for a powerful statement of action from this Conference to UNEA-5.2.

Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, Luisa Frago, Portugal, informed delegates the Committee will meet four times before UNEA-5.2 to discuss draft resolutions submitted for discussion at the Assembly. She expressed hope UNEA-5.2 will initiate negotiations on a global agreement on this issue.

MALAWI stressed negotiations on this issue should be held in-person, under the auspices of UNEP, noting UNEP is "the only forum with the mandate" to address marine litter and plastic pollution.

Underscoring the ministerial statement is not a negotiated text, Co-Convenor Walter Schuldt Espinel, Ecuador, said comments from the first day had been incorporated into a revised draft statement. He said this statement would be representative of the spirit of the Conference and uploaded to the conference website for transparency.



Maren Holsen, Norway



Inger Anderson, UNEP Executive Director

High-level Dialogue

The high-level dialogue took place on Thursday, 2 September. Citing the need for drastic action on marine litter and plastic pollution, Inger Anderson, UNEP Executive Director, underscored the need to: engage industry and financial institutions to reduce virgin plastic production, particularly for single-use plastics; improve the design of plastic products to support circularity and ensure recycling of products at the end of their life; improve solid waste management across the globe; and increase national actions on plastics through, for example, fiscal measures, trade, transport, and citizen engagement. Emphasizing the need for clarity on the full range of consequences of plastic pollution and to act at the source to address them all, she said these efforts must be boosted by a comprehensive global approach.

Emphasizing that plastic pollution is a global threat that requires a global response, ECUADOR said it is critical that UNEA kick off a negotiating process toward an internationally legally binding agreement with progressive elimination targets to reduce the direct and indirect effects of plastic pollution. He stressed the importance of comprehensive participation of stakeholders from the private sector, civil society, academia, and youth.

GERMANY called for a broad global approach to address plastic pollution and marine litter. He emphasized the need to look at the full lifecycle of plastic, avoid single-use and short-lived plastic materials, promote alternatives which are already available, and establish robust waste management systems. He expressed hope this ministerial conference would send a strong message to UNEA-5.2 that we need a reliable legal international foundation to address these issues, as an obligation toward young people and future generations.

Emphasizing that many countries are clamoring for UNEA's mandate to establish an INC to lead to a global agreement on these issues, GHANA noted the draft ministerial statement challenges countries to come together and share responsibility for addressing marine litter and plastic pollution. He underscored that the statement sought to create a level playing field on which nations can work together, and said the world is ready for a legally binding agreement.

VIET NAM highlighted the importance of national actions to address this issue and said thoroughly tackling the problem urgently requires a systemic, global approach with a global agreement that will complement existing frameworks.

Citing examples of its national actions to reduce plastic pollution, SWITZERLAND said the best way to solve this problem is by establishing a robust international framework and



Simonetta Sommaruga, Switzerland

strengthening national policies, international cooperation, and private action. She supported a global legally binding agreement and encouraged participants to adopt the ministerial statement.

Underlining that emissions from plastics are still trending upward, SWEDEN emphasized that the global community must drastically reduce the discharge of plastics into the environment and expressed support for the key messages in the ministerial statement.

PERU cited several impacts of plastic pollution in his country, reaffirmed a commitment to working regionally to resolve the problem, and expressed hope that UNEA-5.2 will work toward an agreement on plastic pollution and marine litter.

DENMARK emphasized that the world is witnessing a dramatic surge in plastic pollution and said changes at the global level are necessary to create a level playing field. She expressed full support for the draft resolution to convene an INC with a mandate to prepare a legally binding instrument. She said now is the time to protect our oceans for the future.

AZERBAIJAN highlighted its work to combat plastic pollution at the national and regional levels, including through a national ban on plastic bags and single-use plastics, which he said can stimulate development of alternative, biodegradable, and environmentally friendly products. He underscored the need for a cooperative approach to this pressing global problem.

BURKINA FASO shared his country's measures to address the issue, including large-scale awareness raising campaigns, working with producers to address the root causes of plastic pollution, and recycling initiatives.



Lea Wermelin, Denmark

Underlining the role of sustainable waste management solutions, BELGIUM supported the ministerial statement, called on countries to respect the waste management hierarchy, and proposed that recycled plastic should compete on a level playing field with virgin plastic.

Supporting the establishment of an INC, the EU noted gaps in the legal policy framework mostly lie in upstream measures and called for a global agreement to help institute a circular economy.

Calling for a spirit of solidarity to tackle the issue, LIBYA stressed the need for financial and technical support for developing countries to address marine litter and plastic pollution.

Sharing several national-level actions, INDONESIA proposed a framework towards a "plastic-less economy" and underscored the importance of inclusivity in negotiating a new agreement.

ALGERIA stressed the leadership of developed countries on this issue given historical plastic pollution. He underlined the need for solidarity, financial assistance, and technology transfer to effectively address the issue of plastic pollution.

Highlighting national efforts to address marine litter and plastic pollution, SRI LANKA underscored the importance of a strong science base and partnerships to implement a new agreement.

BRAZIL lamented that with the absence of reference to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, his country would not be able to endorse the ministerial statement at this stage. However, he anticipated further discussions on the draft under the Committee of Permanent Representatives in Nairobi, Kenya, prior to UNEA-5.2.

Supporting the creation of an INC, YEMEN called for prioritizing recycling and repair of plastic products where possible. He urged developed countries to facilitate technology transfer, noting the need to address issues of compensation and scaling of alternatives to plastic.

ICELAND supported the ministerial statement and pointed to the report of the Nordic Council on the need for an agreement on this issue.

Drawing attention to the measures under the Basel Convention to address plastic pollution and welcoming the ministerial statement, CAMEROON stated any binding agreement must include the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

FIJI strongly supported establishing an INC at UNEA-5.2, saying a comprehensive global agreement is the basis for effective action at every level.

ROMANIA emphasized that involving all stakeholders at the global level is the only way to solve this global challenge.

Emphasizing the importance of this issue to the Pacific region due to high levels of pollution, AUSTRALIA said an urgent global response is required to stem the flow of plastics into the oceans and ensure a sustainable ocean economy.

Underscoring the need for an ambitious, legally binding agreement that addresses the entire lifecycle of plastics, COSTA RICA called for a systemic transformation of the plastic economy and encouraged countries to put concrete commitments on the table.



Sussan Ley, Australia

The UK emphasized that our profligate attitude toward resources is doing immeasurable harm to the natural world and supported establishing a new global agreement to coordinate action on marine litter and marine plastic.

FRANCE called for a legally binding agreement that encompasses the full lifecycle of plastics and enables countries to develop and implement national action plans. She encouraged countries to mobilize as many participants as possible ahead of UNEA-5.2.

Expressing support for establishing an INC at UNEA-5.2., ISRAEL outlined several national actions to combat plastic pollution and said a true solution will require systematic global change based on the polluter pays principle.

ARGENTINA supported starting negotiations toward a global agreement, emphasizing such an agreement must be based on such principles as common but differentiated responsibilities.

ERITREA supported commencing negotiations toward a binding agreement on plastics, emphasizing challenges will need to be addressed based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. He said special attention must be given to building capacity and improving recycling and waste management in developing countries.

MALTA supported global collective action to address this issue, taking into consideration different national circumstances and capacities, and said any new system must provide flexibility.

FINLAND emphasized that a new global agreement would be the most effective way of stopping global leakage of plastic into



Ismael Aznar, Spain

the environment and supported establishing an INC at UNEA-5.2.

GUATEMALA supported an international agreement on marine litter, emphasizing its coastal and marine ecosystems have been hit hard by solid waste pollution. He called on developed countries to provide developing countries with technical, financial, and capacity building assistance to better manage marine litter.

GREECE called for establishing more sustainable consumption and production patterns, including through the introduction of circular economy principles, and supported an ambitious, legally binding global agreement.

The US shared that the country's preferred outcome is a strong mandate focusing on the process for future negotiations, noting it should, *inter alia*: outline all aspects of a new agreement's scope including whether the issue is ocean plastic, plastic, or plastic pollution; build on existing measures without duplicating them; and have a scientific basis, as well as monitoring and reporting requirements.

Supporting the establishment of international norms to address marine litter, the REPUBLIC OF KOREA drew attention to the outcome of the 2021 Partnering for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030 (P4G) Summit which aligns with some aspects of the ministerial statement.

SLOVENIA supported the ministerial statement, stressing there is no time to waste in addressing the issue. SPAIN supported the establishment of an INC, noting the urgency of transitioning to a circular economy and addressing the entire lifecycle of plastics.

Underlining the importance of multi-stakeholder efforts to address marine litter, CHILE noted the synergies between marine plastic pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss.

Acknowledging his country's advocacy for the Osaka Blue Ocean Vision to address marine plastic pollution, JAPAN supported the establishment of an INC at UNEA-5.2 and called for wide participation, including by large polluting countries.

Co-Conveners' Summary

Co-Convener Gustavo Manrique Miranda, Ecuador, welcomed the high level of engagement, noting that 1100 participants joined the conference online and 100 were present at WTO headquarters. He highlighted the overwhelming support for establishing an INC to begin negotiating a new agreement, with many calling for the agreement to be legally binding and to set out financial support and technical assistance measures for developing countries. He also highlighted the many calls for multi-stakeholder participation.

Co-Convener Oliver Boachie, Ghana, explained that countries wishing to endorse the ministerial statement could do so until 15 October 2021. Stating that this Conference was a testament to the ability of multilateralism to address global challenges, Co-Convener Jochen Flasbarth, State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Germany, lauded delegates for sending a strong signal to UNEA-5.2. He said 25 countries had already endorsed the ministerial statement during the Conference and called on others to do the same before the deadline.

Why do we need a resolution?

-  Plastic pollution requires urgent international cooperation and coordination
-  Existing international framework is fragmented and inadequate
-  Successive UNEA Resolutions and Expert Groups justify global action
-  Majority of countries support starting negotiations



A slide from the presentation made by **Juliet Kabera**, Director General, Rwanda Environment Management Authority

Update on Relevant Processes and Closure of the Meeting

Gabriel Quijandría, Minister of the Environment, Peru, said his country was co-sponsoring a draft resolution to be tabled at UNEA-5.2, which calls on UNEA to establish an INC to begin negotiating a global agreement on plastic pollution. As co-sponsor of the resolution, Juliet Kabera, Director General, Rwanda Environment Management Authority, explained that the resolution is a call for global action and an opportunity to address the fragmentation of the existing framework related to plastic pollution. She noted the draft resolution's objective is to eliminate plastic pollution and promote a circular economy. She called on delegates to consider making proposals to strengthen the text.

Expressing his regret that time had run out, Moderator Woodward thanked the co-conveners, organizers, and participants, and closed the meeting at 4:13 pm (CET).

Upcoming Meetings

2021 UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP 15): The 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD (COP 15), the 10th meeting of the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, and the 4th meeting of the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing are scheduled to take place over two sessions to review the achievement and delivery of the CBD's Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. The meeting is also expected to take a final decision on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, as well as decisions on related topics, including capacity building and resource mobilization. **dates:** 11-15 October 2021 (*virtual*) and 25 April-8 May 2022 (*in-person*) **location:** online and Kunming, China **www:** <https://www.cbd.int/meetings/COP-15>

UNFCCC COP 26: The 26th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP 26), the 16th meeting of the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 16), and the third meeting of the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 3) will convene after a one-year postponement due to the COVID-19 pandemic. **dates:** 1-12 November 2021 **location:** Glasgow, Scotland, UK **www:** <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/conferences/glasgow-climate-change-conference>

Twelfth WTO Ministerial Conference: The 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) will take place from 30 November to 3 December 2021 in Geneva, Switzerland. MC12 was originally scheduled to take place from 8-11 June 2020 in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Conference will touch on issues pertaining to the WTO, including plastic pollution. **dates:** 30 November – 3 December 2021 **location:** WTO Headquarters, Geneva, Switzerland **www:** https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/mc12_e/mc12_e.htm

61st Meeting of the GEF Council: The Council, the GEF's main governing body, meets twice annually to develop, adopt and evaluate the operational policies and programmes for GEF-financed activities. It also reviews and approves the work program (projects submitted for approval). **dates:** 7-9 December 2021 **location:** Washington, D.C., US **www:** <https://www.thegef.org/council-meetings/gef-61st-council-meeting>

Seventeenth meeting of the Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee to the Stockholm Convention (POPRC17): At this meeting the POPRC will consider, *inter alia*, a draft risk management evaluation on methoxychlor and draft risk profiles on Dieldrin Plus and UV-328. The Committee will also consider proposals for inclusion in Annexes A, B and/ or C to the Convention of chlorpyrifos, chlorinated paraffins with carbon chain lengths in the range C14-17 and chlorination levels at or exceeding 45% chlorine by weight, and long-chain perfluorocarboxylic acids, their salts and related compounds. This meeting will either be held in Geneva on 24-28 January 2022 or online for a total of nine days between 17 and 28 January 2022. **dates:** January 2022 **location:** TBC **www:** <http://chm.pops.int/TheConvention/POPsReviewCommittee/Meetings/POPRC17/Overview/tabid/8900/Default.aspx>

Resumed Fifth Session of the UNEA (UNEA 5.2): UNEA-5.2 will take place under the theme "Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals." Its aim will be to connect and consolidate environmental actions within the context of sustainable development and motivate the sharing and implementation of successful approaches. At this Conference, UNEA will also discuss whether to establish an INC towards a new agreement on marine litter and plastic pollution. The in-person session of UNEA-5 will be followed by a Special Session of the UNEA (UNEA-SS), on 3-4 March 2022, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the creation of UNEP in 1972. **date:** 28 February – 2 March 2022 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** <https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/unea5>

Glossary

AHEG	<i>Ad Hoc</i> Expert Group
IMO	International Maritime Organization
INC	Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee
UNEA	UN Environment Assembly
UNEP	UN Environment Programme
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
WTO	World Trade Organization