

# Plastics and Human Rights

## Geneva Beat Plastic Pollution Dialogues

Update on plastics and the environment [↗](#)  
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### HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACTS OF PLASTICS

Humanity produces more than 350 million tons of plastics every year [1]. These plastics greatly impact the enjoyment of various human rights, including the right to **health**, the right to **science**, the right to **information**, and the rights of **future generation** [2]. These impacts are generated all along the plastics life cycle through extraction activities, greenhouse gas emissions from production, misinformation campaigns, health risks associated with plastic use and disposal, and more. **Vulnerable groups**, such as children and small island developing States, are disproportionately impacted [3].

Therefore, it is urgent to address the interface of plastics and human rights. This summary highlights current efforts in that direction, as well as shortcomings and paths forward to address the plastic crisis through a rights-based approach.

### CURRENT EFFORTS AND GAPS

The **UN Environment Programme (UNEP)** will soon publish a report on plastic pollution through an environmental justice lens which includes policy recommendations for various actors. UNEP's efforts also focus on providing assistance to stakeholder groups and fostering education and awareness [4]. The **Basel Convention** is taking action against plastic pollution [5]. However, issues of cost allocation, effectiveness and monitoring remain challenging. In the marine pollution sector, steps to address plastic waste are undertaken by

the **International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL)** [6]. Yet, current efforts are inadequate to address the specific needs of marginalized groups.

While existing agreements address specific issues along the plastics production chain, there is currently no instrument encompassing the **entire life cycle**. Additionally, traditional approaches to regulate environmental issues often overlook questions of **environmental justice and access to remedies**.

### NEXT STEPS

A comprehensive response to the plastics crisis is essential due to the complexity of the issue. A **rights-based approach** to the plastics life cycle can help prevent and redress human rights infringements. Steps in that direction include:

- ▶ Integrate human rights and environmental justice concerns into instruments and actions that address plastic-related issues
- ▶ Foster **participation** and involve communities and vulnerable groups
- ▶ Develop and enforce **monitoring**, reporting and diffuse information
- ▶ Foster **accountability** through extended producer responsibility
- ▶ Overcome linear thinking in product design and promote **circularity**
- ▶ Ensure **liability** and mechanisms of compensation for harm
- ▶ Support a global legally binding **agreement** that addresses the entire plastics life cycle