

GENEVA BEAT PLASTIC POLLUTION²

Outcomes of dialogues (August 2021 - February 2022)



The time to address the plastic crisis is now. Plastic pollution has become a global concern that requires an urgent and international response involving all relevant actors at different levels. Ahead of the second segment of the 5th UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2), the momentum toward the establishment of an international legally binding instrument was stronger than ever. This report presents insights of the Geneva Beat Plastic Pollution dialogues - a series of multi-stakeholder dialogues in support of coordinated approaches to address the plastic crisis - on the key elements to consider in the negotiations toward a global agreement. The dialogues contributed to raising awareness and the sense of urgency that lead to the adoption, at UNEA 5.2, of a historic mandate to negotiate an international legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution.

Drowning in Plastics: A Threat to People and Planet

As the evidence of the presence and impacts of plastics (including micro- and nano-plastics) in all ecosystems around the world is growing, the plastic crisis is becoming a central point of global attention. Production of virgin plastics has been exponentially increasing and current investments in petrochemical infrastructure are supporting this trend for the decades to come. Flows of plastic waste into aquatic ecosystems are expected to reach 29 million tonnes per year by 2040. Plastic pollution is also leaving a strong mark on terrestrial ecosystems and communities around the globe. From the Mariana trench to Mt. Everest, there is virtually no place on Earth which is left untouched by plastic pollution.

The negative impacts of plastic pollution on people and the environment have been documented throughout the lifecycle of plastics, from extraction and manufacture to use and disposal. The first series of the Geneva Beat Plastic Pollution Dialogues, held from November 2020 to February 2021 in the run-up to the first segment of the fifth UN Environment Assembly, provided an overview of how plastics and the chemical additives they contain are threatening the climate, ecosystems and wildlife, as well as human health and human rights. Current patterns of production and consumption of plastics are seriously compromising sustainable development at large.

A Global Solution to a Global Crisis

Considering the breadth and transboundary nature of the plastic crisis, it has become clear that global coordinated action is key to halt further plastic pollution. While voluntary initiatives have helped raise the political momentum on the issue, they are by far insufficient to effectively and comprehensively tackle this crisis. Current efforts to address plastic pollution are fragmented and tend to focus on downstream measures, thus failing to deal with the problem at a systemic level. Thus, an increasing number of actors from all parts of society have been calling for the establishment of an international legally binding instrument (LBI) on plastics for several years.

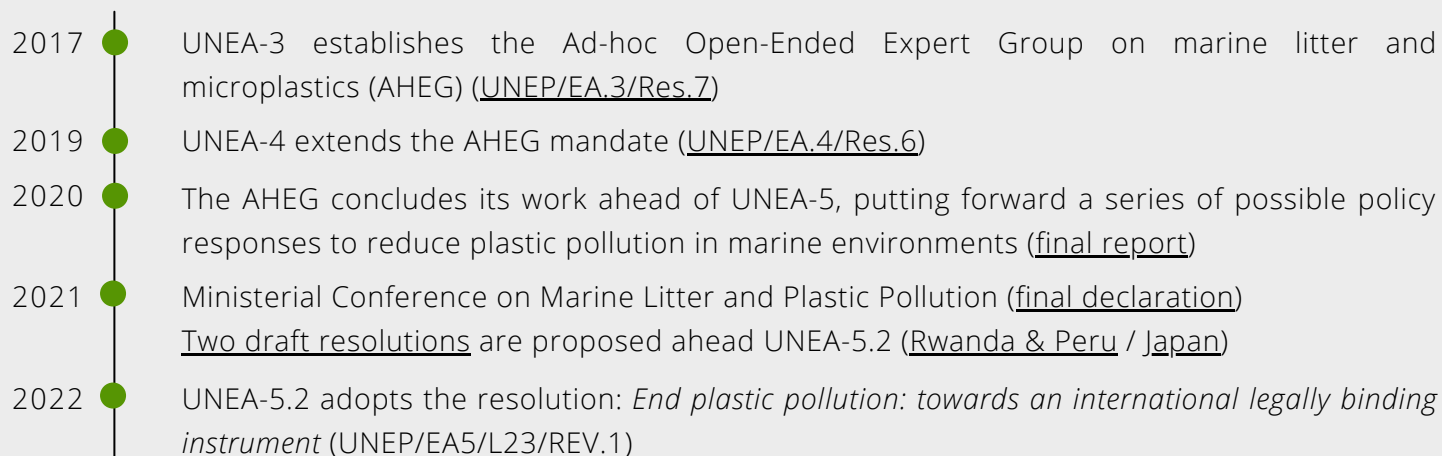
Such an agreement is needed to put humanity on the path toward a pollution-free planet. A global response with clear targets and measures is essential to prevent plastic and toxic chemicals leakage into the environment, to safeguard people's health and human rights and to address the climate and biodiversity crises. A coordinated global response through a LBI also presents massive economic and development opportunities in building a safe transition from a disastrous linear economic model relying on fossil fuels.

UNEA-5: A Turning Point in the History of Plastics

The Geneva Beat Plastic Pollution dialogues contributed to rising momentum toward a global instrument on plastics ahead of UNEA-5.2. After the first Ministerial Conference on Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution, organized in September 2021 in Geneva, Peru and Rwanda presented a draft resolution, which gathered the support of more than 60 Member States. In December 2021, Japan also proposed an alternative draft resolution. The two were merged before the beginning of the negotiations in Nairobi.

As the UNEA meeting got closer, the idea of a global LBI addressing the whole life cycle of plastics was receiving tremendous support from civil society, private sector and academia. Momentum kept growing, pressure and ambition kept mounting, and the possibility of creating an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop a plastic treaty grabbed the world's attention. On 2 March 2022, 175 countries participating in UNEA-5.2 got together and adopted the resolution *End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument*. This historic resolution mandates UNEP Executive Director to convene an INC with a view to develop and adopt, by the end of 2024, a LBI on plastic pollution based on a comprehensive approach that addresses the full life cycle of plastics.

Major Milestones in the Global Fight Against Plastic Pollution at UNEA

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- A vertical timeline with a green line and circular markers for each year. The text to the right of each marker describes the event.
- 2017 ● UNEA-3 establishes the Ad-hoc Open-Ended Expert Group on marine litter and microplastics (AHEG) ([UNEP/EA.3/Res.7](#))
 - 2019 ● UNEA-4 extends the AHEG mandate ([UNEP/EA.4/Res.6](#))
 - 2020 ● The AHEG concludes its work ahead of UNEA-5, putting forward a series of possible policy responses to reduce plastic pollution in marine environments ([final report](#))
 - 2021 ● Ministerial Conference on Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution ([final declaration](#))
[Two draft resolutions](#) are proposed ahead UNEA-5.2 ([Rwanda & Peru](#) / [Japan](#))
 - 2022 ● UNEA-5.2 adopts the resolution: *End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument* (UNEP/EA5/L23/REV.1)

Key Recommendations for a Successful Plastics Agreement

As the world gets ready to negotiate a historical agreement to end plastic pollution, the outcomes and take-aways from the Geneva Beat Plastic Pollution Dialogues are summarized below to support and inform the negotiation of an effective treaty.

Clear Global Goal

The first step to stopping plastic pollution is for governments and other stakeholders to rally behind a clear common objective. An ambitious common goal can give direction to all actors in their efforts to halt plastic pollution. The future treaty should include provisions for national action plans and commitments that contribute to this global ambition while being tailored to their national circumstances.

Lifecycle Approach

In order to provide a comprehensive response to the plastic crisis, the scope of the instrument must encompass the entire life cycle and include both upstream and downstream measures. This holistic approach would include minimizing virgin plastic production and consumption, promoting a non-toxic circular economy for plastics and foster sound waste management. Measures should target all sources of plastic pollution, both land- and sea-based.

Rights-based Approach

Human rights principles must play a crucial role in the design of a chemically safe circular economy for plastics. The prevention, precaution and polluter-pays principles constitute a strong foundation to ensure the new agreement protect human rights. Differentiated and specific vulnerabilities, such as the special burden carried by women, indigenous people, children and poor communities should be recognized and addressed.

Openness in Response Options

The plastic crisis is complex and multifaceted, and there is no single solution to address it. Parties should be ready to explore all types of response options, including regulatory measures and caps on plastic production, and remain mindful of disinformation leading to false solutions that merely displace the problem in time or space, or that confounds the existing climate, biodiversity and toxic pollution crisis.

Harmonized Metrics and Standards

The agreement should ensure adequate monitoring and reporting systems which rely on common definitions and consistent measurements. The latter are essential to harmonize policy efforts and stimulate investment and innovation. Common metrics can help ensure consistency in what public and private funding aims to achieve, which is a key factor for developing an efficient set of responses to the plastic crisis.

Multi-stakeholder Participation

In order to achieve its goal, the agreement will require the engagement of many actors and sectors. Considering the perspectives of regional and local governments, civil society organizations, indigenous people and local communities, industry as well as workers and trade unions will be essential to minimize plastic pollution and its impacts. Mobilizing resources, interests and experts from all stakeholders groups throughout the negotiation and implementation phases will be equally important. Collaboration of industry and finance actors to the common objective will also be key in that regard.

Financial Cooperation and Technical Assistance

The provision of sufficient and reliable funds will be key to ensure all countries can implement the agreement. The finance mechanisms chosen should ensure efficient delivery of funds for the secretariat's operations and for support to developing countries, in particular SIDS and LDCs. A dedicated multilateral fund could facilitate predictable funding flows to drive a transition to a circular economy for plastics. However, addressing the plastic crisis will require external financing, mainstreaming and industry involvement; thus requiring an integrated approach to financing. Innovative finance mechanisms, such as EPR schemes or a tax on chemicals sales, should be explored.

Complementarity with Existing Instruments

Due to the limitations of current instruments, the establishment of a specific framework for plastic is essential. However, the new agreement must build on and develop synergies with existing instruments to avoid duplication. This means building on instruments addressing specific issues related to plastics, such as the Basel Convention and the WTO informal dialogue on plastics, and enhancing synergies with other framework, including on climate and biodiversity. The new agreement should promote interagency cooperation that helps member States and stakeholders connect the dots between complex and cross-cutting issues.

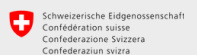
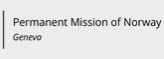
The Geneva Beat Plastic Pollution Dialogues



Various actors in Geneva are engaged in rethinking the way we manufacture, use, trade and manage plastics. The Geneva Beat Plastic Pollution Dialogues aim to facilitate further engagement and discussion among the stakeholders in Geneva and beyond. In the run-up to UNEA-5, the dialogues presented achievements by stakeholders, latest research and governance options to address the plastic crisis and support coordinated approaches that can lead to more efficient decision making.

This report presents the key messages which emerged from the second series of dialogues, held in the run-up to UNEA-5.2 from August 2021 to February 2022 with representatives from UN and other inter-governmental organizations, Member States, civil society organizations, academia and the private sector.

Partners



Resources The reports listed below were presented during the second series Geneva Beat Plastic Pollution Dialogues. Find further resources on the [Plastics and the Environment webpage](#).

- [A UN Treaty on plastic pollution - White Paper](#) | Ellen MacArthur Foundation | 2021
- [The business case for a UN treaty on plastic pollution](#) | WWF, Ellen MacArthur Foundation & BCG | 2020
- [Convention on Plastic Pollution – Toward a new global agreement to address plastic pollution](#) | EIA, CIEL & Gaia | June 2020
- [The stages of the plastics cycle and their impacts on human rights](#) | SR Toxic Report to UNGA | July 2021
- [From Pollution to Solution: a global assessment of marine litter and plastic pollution](#) | UNEP | October 2021
- [Addressing marine litter and microplastics: UN system-wide contributions](#) | UN EMG | 2022
- [Convention on Plastic Pollution - Essential Elements: Finance](#) | EIA | January 2022
- [Global agreement to prevent plastic pollution - Exploring financing needs and opportunities](#) | Nordic Council | February 2022