

# Backgrounder

## Overview

Greenpeace, together with our allies in the Break Free from Plastic Movement, is working to secure a strong, legally binding **Global Plastics Treaty** at the United Nations. The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) mandate, "[End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment](#)," sets out a goal for the treaty to be negotiated before the end of 2024.



The upcoming Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC4) meeting on April 23 to 29, 2024 in Ottawa, Canada will be the fourth of five negotiating meetings happening until the end of the year. INC4 will also welcome Ambassador Luis Vayas Valdivieso from Ecuador as the new Chair for the rest of the INC process. **Greenpeace has a delegation representing more than a dozen countries that will be present at INC4 throughout the duration of the talks.**

### A strong, effective, and ambitious Global Plastics Treaty must:

#### 1. End plastic pollution - from production to disposal - to protect the environment and human health

Plastic pollution floods our planet, destroys biodiversity, and worsens the climate crisis across the entire life of plastic - from extraction, production, packaging, distribution, incineration and dumping. This deadly cycle brought by runaway plastic production and use must stop for good.

#### 2. Set a legally-binding target to reduce plastic production by at least 75% by 2040 to stay below 1.5° C

The best available modeling<sup>1 2</sup> suggests that to be aligned with a 1.5° C compatible pathway you need to achieve a decline in plastic production of between 46% and 70% by 2050 against 2019 levels. However, we believe that these models are conservative. These models only focus

<sup>1</sup> Research by [Pacific Environment](#) suggests to be aligned with 1.5 you need to achieve a reduction in production of at least 75% against BAU levels.

<sup>2</sup> [Eunomia](#) suggests you need a 75% reduction in per capita plastic consumption by 2050.

on plastic's climate impacts - but these are often underrepresented due to emissions across the plastic life-cycle [not being counted fully](#). They don't include plastic's effects on biodiversity and human health, and that is why we have to achieve a more ambitious reduction ('at least 75%') by a sooner date (2040).

Plastic production keeps us dependent on fossil fuels and not only [drives climate change](#), but also biodiversity loss and harms communities and workers living near production sites and landfills. If the industry has its way, plastic production could [double within the next 10-15 years, and triple by 2050](#). The treaty must cut plastic production by at least 75% by 2040 based on a 2019 baseline followed by a phasedown in the production and use of plastic and deliver a just transition away from all virgin production capacity.

### **3. End single-use plastics, starting with the worst offending items like plastic sachets**

All plastics are problematic when considered from a whole life cycle approach — the environmental, health and social impacts from extraction (e.g fossil sources), plastic production, use, waste management and disposal make a strong case that plastic must be reduced as far as possible, particularly where safer, more sustainable, and circular substitutes exist. Due to the large-scale use of plastic in today's society, it is imperative that we eliminate the most problematic plastic products first. Greenpeace Canada and allies presented [a proposed list](#) of problematic plastics and substances to the Canadian government.

The Global Plastics Treaty must consider both plastic materials as well as plastic products, to allow broader and more effective elimination of specific plastic materials that are particularly prone to cause pollution or harm to human health. The treaty should regulate plastic products and materials by group wherever possible to avoid regrettable substitution and production.

### **4. Ensure a just and inclusive transition to a low-carbon, zero-waste, reuse-based economy**

The treaty must drive a just transition to sustainable livelihoods across the plastics supply chain, and empower workers, prioritizing waste pickers and other affected communities. It must support reuse and refill business models; prioritize the interests of Indigenous Peoples and advance traditional knowledge.

### **5. Be firmly rooted in a human rights-based approach that reduces inequality, prioritizes human health, and centers justice in its creation and implementation**

From production to disposal, plastic pollution negatively impacts our health and human rights. It accelerates social injustice and environmental degradation, and aggravates inequalities brought about by the climate crisis. The negotiations must ensure fair and equitable representation throughout the negotiation and implementation process from Indigenous

Peoples and communities disproportionately affected by the plastic pollution crisis. The treaty must have a strong foundation in justice and human rights to mitigate further harm.

### **What happened during INC3?**

The third Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee meeting held in Nairobi, Kenya last November 2023 ended in frustration as low-ambition countries derailed the negotiations, with member states walking away from Nairobi without a mandate to produce a first draft of the treaty. We are far behind where we should be. Presented below are a few noteworthy developments.

- Ultimately, blocker interests were allowed to set the terms of negotiations early on by refusing to accept the Zero Draft as a basis for negotiations on the text.
  - Because of this, we are not moving on to a first draft of the treaty text at INC4, but we will be working with a **revised Zero Draft** between INC3 and INC4. This means a more bloated version of the Zero Draft stuffed full of worse options on what the treaty *does*.
- There was no agreed **mandate to do intersessional work**. Using the intersessional period between INCs to advance important scientific and technical work is critical to achieving a strong treaty.
- Despite this setback, INC3 saw delegates begin to genuinely discuss substantive positions on key control measures and means of implementation in the treaty, which is an improvement on INC2. Reuse in particular seems an area of common ground and potential interest even for low-ambition countries like the United States.
- However, some of the options in the revised Zero Draft draft are a fundamental threat to the treaty's success, including options to remove any provision that would address the production of primary plastic polymers - if the treaty does not address plastic production at the source, it will fail to deliver the UNEA mandate.
- But key options are still in play for the first draft e.g. controls on the production of primary plastic polymers, reduction and reuse targets, bans on problematic and avoidable products.
- Clearer red-lines are emerging between lowest ambition and genuinely high ambition blocs — the most important of these are around how the treaty addresses plastic polymer production and means of implementation.

### **What is Greenpeace hoping to achieve in this round of the negotiations?**

The core focus areas that Greenpeace will be looking out for this INC4 are:

- Ensuring that an option for a **global target to reduce primary plastic polymer production** is retained in the text. There is a risk that as we begin serious negotiations on text that ambitious countries will concede to bad-faith countries in this area.
- Ensuring that **targets for reduction, reuse and refill** are retained as an option in the text.
- Given the slow progress so far, what we need to see is Member States moving into actual **negotiation of the treaty text**. A first step will be states working to consolidate the many options in the revised Zero Draft, and we are expecting states to submit in-session documents like conference room papers (CRPs) with concrete proposals.
- We will be keeping an eye on whether the Chair is given a **mandate to prepare a first draft of the treaty** text.

### **What topics are expected to be discussed at INC4 in Ottawa, Canada?**

- The format of the negotiations will become clear when the Chair shares the scenario note and agenda for the meeting, but we can expect that there will be further discussions on the control measures in the treaty (i.e. what does the treaty do) and the means of implementation (i.e. what resources are needed to ensure these measures happen and how are they paid for).
- As we saw at INC3, we expect that low ambition countries will use discussions over the scope of the treaty and principles to be included to delay proceedings. It is far more important to begin negotiating on the substance of the treaty, including the control measures and means of implementation.
  - The recently concluded United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA6) gave a preview of this debate, with several countries pushing for reference to the ‘full life-cycle of plastic’ and the impact of plastic on climate and biodiversity to be removed from resolutions and declarations.

### **How are countries showing up for the treaty?**

As mentioned above, some key themes are emerging in terms of which countries have a particular interest in an ambitious or weak treaty. We can broadly break this down into:

- **Higher ambition countries**, who support measures to limit plastic production and/or use of certain problematic plastics, the inclusion of a human-rights approach, and reducing/ending inclusion of toxic chemicals in plastics e.g. the High Ambition Coalition which includes Norway, the European Union, United Kingdom, Canada, Rwanda and other Africa Group members, and Peru.
- **Lower ambition countries**, who tend to focus only on the marine litter aspect of plastic pollution - ignoring the impacts of plastic production, and push for the treaty to focus more on National Action Plans rather than globally binding agreements e.g. US, Japan.

- Within this category, there is some nuance e.g. Brazil is playing a key role in moving negotiations forward and advocating strongly for measures on regulating chemicals, but its positions are not ambitious, for example delaying [progress on negotiations](#) at INC2.
- **Countries** that may **block progress**, which are petrochemical states/oil-producing states that are focused on maintaining the status quo while pushing for false solutions such as chemical recycling, e.g. Saudi Arabia
- Several countries are making their voice heard due to being disproportionately affected by plastic pollution e.g. Small Island Developing States and Developing Nations

### **Why do we need a Global Plastics Treaty?**

The plastics crisis has reached an unprecedented scale and knows no territorial boundaries. Plastic supply chains are global and pollution crosses international borders via waste trade and the Ocean Commons. While Big Oil and big brands make a profit, Indigenous Peoples, fenceline communities, and the Global South bear the brunt of social injustice, climate chaos and pollution. Currently, there is no comprehensive international law addressing plastics. A global crisis demands a globally coordinated solution, and that could be the Global Plastics Treaty.

### **Why do we need the Global Plastics Treaty to cut plastic production and use?**

- Because without cutting plastic production, ending plastic pollution is not possible. Plastic pollutes from the moment it is created up to its disposal. We must negotiate a strong treaty that tackles plastic at every stage of its lifecycle.
- Over 99% of plastic is made from fossil fuels, and with production only increasing, it is a [significant driver of climate change](#). Predicted expansion of plastic production, numbering into the hundreds of billions of dollars in new infrastructure investment, means that by 2060 annual greenhouse gas emissions from the plastics lifecycle are projected to more than double, to 4.3 Gt CO<sub>2</sub>e.
- Greenpeace is calling for the treaty to **set a legally-binding target to reduce plastic production by at least 75% by 2040 to stay below 1.5° C**, followed by significant reductions in production year-on-year. The treaty should eventually aim to phase out virgin production entirely, as a [number of scientists](#) have called for.
- In addition to massively cutting plastic production, we also need to ban all non-essential single-use applications<sup>3</sup> and accelerate a just transition to reuse and refill systems as recycled plastic is toxic and cannot exist in a truly circular economy.

### **What is Canada's position on the treaty, and the issue of production cuts?**

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<sup>3</sup> Excluding medical applications and equipment.

Canada has [indicated](#) support for a legally-binding agreement on plastic pollution that covers the full lifecycle of plastic, and is a founding member of the [High Ambition Coalition](#): a group of more than 60 countries representing every region in the UN with the aim to end plastic pollution by 2040. As host country for INC4 and a member of the [Host Country Alliance](#), Canada has indicated its commitment to convening leaders to ensure talks are productive and end later this year.

On the issue of production, Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault has [said](#) “It is simply not enough to treat plastic pollution as a waste management issue,” and indicated he is “[not opposed](#)” to limits on production. The federal government has not yet released an official position on measures within the current zero draft or its desired outcome for a treaty beyond it being legally binding and covering the full life cycle of plastic.

## **ENDS**

[Spokespeople](#) are available in English, French, Swahili, Filipino, Arabic, Korean and Japanese.

### **For more information, please contact:**

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The deadline for [media accreditation registration](#) is on **April 16, 2024**.