



The Secretariat for the Intergovernmental Negotiations Committee (For the prospective Plastics Treaty)

United Nations Environment Programme

*Re: Submission from the Global Alliance of Waste-pickers for the 1<sup>st</sup> INC meeting in Uruguay.*

We waste pickers collect approximately 60% of all the plastic that is collected for recycling globally. With our work in plastic waste collection, sorting, aggregation and sale for recycling, we have played a historical role in reducing plastic pollution. We come from poor, humble and marginalized backgrounds, oppressed castes, working classes, religious and ethnic minorities and indigenous communities. Due to the nature of our work, we are exposed to hazardous working conditions including exposure to air, water and soil pollution, heat and high humidity. These working conditions are taking a severe toll on our health. With climate change becoming a day-to-day reality, average temperatures are increasing, and there are frequent floods because of erratic rains. With these events, we are vulnerable to many more health risks and loss of livelihood and income. We are threatened at work by climate change. We face other threats which contribute to our loss of livelihood such as increasing privatization of waste management, waste to energy or incineration projects, and exclusion through other public policy interventions in plastic waste management, including the omission of our work in the norms of Extended Producers Responsibility. Even then, we are not disheartened. We create work for ourselves by engaging in waste-picking and recycling and try to earn a decent livelihood. Our work in recycling is contributing to a reduction in plastic pollution, lower carbon emissions and a strengthening of the circular economy.

Many countries and city governments have started recognising the role we play in plastic waste management and are establishing norms mandating waste-picker integration and partnership in waste management. We are getting contracts from municipal authorities to engage in the domain of waste management. We are being viewed as popular environment educators and organizers in the fight for environmental justice and rights. Our involvement is therefore crucial to the formulation of the Plastics Treaty. Further, our involvement in the plastics treaty

process has been mandated in the UNEA 5.2 resolution, where we have been recognised as workers in the informal and cooperative settings engaged in the recycling of plastics. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the member states are taking important steps to include us in the discussion on the prospective Plastics Treaty. We welcome those steps.

We are grateful to the UNEP for funding the participation of two waste-pickers, Maria Soledad and John Xavier in the Open Ended Working Group (OEWG) meeting in Dakar and for the space given to waste-pickers to share their thoughts in the multi-stakeholder forum, plenaries and meeting with Ms Inger Anderson, Executive Director, UNEP.

We would like to share with the Secretariat that many of the demands of the waste-pickers endorsed by member states such as Chile, Colombia, Kenya and Norway have not yet been reflected in the interim report of the OEWG meeting. We request you to ensure that those demands and agreements of the member states are reflected in the report of the meeting, as was proposed by the Norwegian delegation and highlighted by the member states including Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay and agreed upon by the others present in the informal meeting. Later our demands and the agreement reached in the informal meeting were reiterated by the Kenyan delegation in the OEWG concluding plenary. Those demands are shared below for reference:

Financial support should be provided to at least 6 waste-pickers for participating in the Plastics Treaty Negotiations i.e. upcoming Intergovernmental Negotiation Committee Meetings (INCs), and mandating the Secretariat to prepare a status report for meaningful participation of the waste-pickers (workers engaged in recycling in the cooperative and informal settings) in the negotiations, and commissioning a report highlighting the contribution of waste-pickers in reducing plastic pollution and encouraging recycling.

We request you to financially support the participation of at least 6 waste-pickers from different parts of the world, as the work of waste-pickers varies across the regions and contexts. Participation of multiple waste-pickers ensures that the workers follow different tracks of the negotiations.

When the status report for the meaningful participation in INCs and contribution of waste-pickers in plastic pollution reduction is prepared, we would like to provide inputs for the same.

In addition to the above requests, we suggest that the member states dedicate time for discussion on Just Transition in the upcoming INC. Any discussion on Just Transition within

the realm of the plastics treaty should include workers engaged in plastic production, packaging, recycling and disposal and also the workers whose work is affected by plastics pollution. From waste-pickers and other informal recycling workers' perspectives, the Just Transition discussion needs to include a mandate for producers to use highly recyclable materials for increasing recovery rates, and partner with the waste-pickers and other workers in the informal recycling sector to implement Extended Producers Responsibility. Just Transition discussion also needs to focus on improving the livelihoods of the workers in the informal and cooperative settings and integration into the plastic management system and fair remuneration for their work.

It is important to note that the waste-pickers livelihoods are being threatened by the plans for dump site closure, installation of incineration plants, banning of plastics and introduction of automation technologies in waste management and sorting. We strongly suggest that before any dumpsite closure, there should be an appropriate plan prepared and implemented to ensure that waste-pickers have sustainable livelihood options, so that dumpsite closure does not mean the end of work and income for them. Similarly, before rolling out bans on plastic materials, we request the member states to institute and implement plans for ensuring that the workers and enterprises engaged in plastic production, packaging and recycling are supported to make a transition to better livelihood opportunities. We as waste-pickers are not averse to the technological up-gradation in waste management and recyclable material sorting, we suggest that the technological up-gradation should be done by keeping the workers in mind, in other words, technological up-gradation should mean more and safer jobs and forms of work for waste-pickers and other recyclers in the informal and cooperative settings.

We hope that our demands and the agreement of member states in the OEWG meeting are mentioned in the report of the OEWG, action is taken on the same and a dedicated discussion on Just Transition involving waste-pickers and other workers is organized in the upcoming INC meeting in Uruguay.

Yours sincerely,

Waste-pickers and Members of the Plastics Treaty Working Group, Global Alliance of Waste-pickers

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