



SUBMISSION TO THE MEMBER STATES PARTICIPATING IN THE FIRST INTERGOVERNMENTAL NEGOTIATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING IN PUNTA DEL ESTE, 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, working classes, survivors of abuse and violence, oppressed castes, racial, 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. These events make us 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 livelihoods 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 earning 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 recognizing 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 United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) 5.2 resolution, where we have been recognized 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. Further, we ask the following from the member states participating in the Intergovernmental Negotiations Committee (INC):

Asks:

1. Including a definition of Just Transition and a description of Waste-pickers in the draft text for the negotiations.

Waste-pickers: *‘Waste pickers constitute most workers in informal and cooperative settings in the waste sector. Waste pickers can be described as people who participate (individually or collectively) in the collection, separation, sorting, transport, and sale of recyclable and reusable materials and products (paper, plastic, metal, glass, and other materials) in an informal or semi-formal capacity, as own-account workers, or in a cooperative or social and solidarity economy setting, and as workers who subsequently achieved formal work arrangements through their organizations. The description includes itinerant waste pickers, current and former waste-pickers who have new roles and engagement in their organizations, and those who have been integrated into municipal solid waste management systems and continue to retrieve, sort, and sell recyclables.’* This description is based on the definition included in the constitution of the International Alliance of Waste Pickers.

Just Transition: *‘A just transition is defined as ending plastic pollution in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind. It is based on making visible those already working at all stages of the plastic value chain, including workers under informal and cooperative settings (including waste pickers), and recognizing their fundamental human dignity, and their historic contribution. It involves maximizing the social and economic opportunities of ending plastic pollution while minimizing and carefully managing any challenges – including through effective social dialogue among all groups impacted, and respect for fundamental human rights. A plan for a just transition will provide and guarantee better and decent work, social protection, more training opportunities, and greater job security for workers at all stages of the plastic value chain including workers in informal and cooperative settings (including waste pickers) and all workers affected by plastic pollution. Its specific outworking will depend on local context and local consultation.’* This definition has been drawn up by representatives of waste pickers’ movements from around the world

and draws on the ILO definition frequently referred to in the context of climate action, and the definition proposed by the International Trade Union Congress in their submission to the Secretariat.

2. **Establish a cluster to discuss Just Transition:** We call for “Just Transition” for waste-pickers and other workers in the plastics value chain to be discussed in the INCs by creating a cluster specifically focused on Just Transition. The cluster should patiently listen to workers to ensure that their voices, articulations and aspirations for Just Transition are included in the discussion.
3. **Financial Support for waste-pickers participation in future INCs and other plastics treaty-related meetings:** Financial support should be provided to at least 6 waste-pickers for participating in each upcoming Intergovernmental Negotiation Committee Meetings (INCs) and mandating the Secretariat to prepare a status report regarding the meaningful participation of the waste-pickers (workers engaged in recycling in the cooperative and informal settings) in the negotiations. 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. All six can be funded directly by UNEP or the member states can ensure the participation of the waste-pickers by including them in their delegation. We are grateful to UNEP for financially supporting one member of our delegation to participate in the current INC. We are also thankful to the Government of South Africa for including one waste-picker in their official delegation. We request the member states follow the precedent set by South Africa to ensure the participation of waste pickers from their respective countries.
4. **Commission a report highlighting the contribution of waste-pickers in recycling and reducing plastic pollution:** We request the member states to mandate the Secretariat for commissioning a report demonstrating the contribution of waste-pickers in reducing plastic pollution and encouraging recycling. 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.

Yours Sincerely

Members of the Plastics Treaty Working Group,

International Alliance of Waste-pickers