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WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS MAJOR GROUP'S JOINT POSITION ON INC

Shared priorities for the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment

Foreword

We, the organisations representing and organising the hundreds of millions of workers of the global supply chain in plastic production, manufacturing, use, waste collection, reuse, recycling and disposal - as well as workers in agriculture, fisheries, food processing, packaging, services, catering, hospitality and restaurants - **united as Constituents of the Workers and Trade Unions UN Major Group:**

- **Emphasize the pressing necessity to comprehensively address the environmental degradation and societal crises caused by plastic waste pollution and plastic-related health risks and hazards** - including major occupational health and safety (OSH), and the global threat to food safety, food security and human and animal nutrition;
- **Urge States and all level of governments to act decisively and address plastic waste pollution and plastic-related adverse impacts on public health and on global ecosystems and the environment, both on land and in the marine environment;**
- **Support a legally binding international instrument** to guide and direct the policies, legal and regulatory frameworks and actions of States, business - from multinational enterprises to SMEs - and plastic users.

We equally hold that to succeed in its goal the Treaty must:

- **take a comprehensive approach and concrete, adequate measures to ensure a Just Transition (JT) throughout its negotiation and implementation process - as per the JT definition of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which includes:**
 - the respect of workers' rights regardless of employment status;
 - the protection all workers in vulnerable conditions;
 - social dialogue with workers' organisations at all stages of the negotiation process and implementation;
 - adequate measures to guarantee employability, equity and transparency for all workers in the transition away from single-use plastic production and waste.

These measures go hand in hand with protecting human health, as well as with recovering and restoring environmental integrity and the planet's land- and water-based ecosystems.



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- **be based on principles and goals that are fully in line with the protection of public health and the environment.** Incorporating and prioritizing such principles and goals in the Treaty will ensure a comprehensive response to the environmental and public health crisis caused by plastic waste and related hazards.
- **build a strong and equitable multilateral regulatory framework for a sustainable future by:**
 1. addressing public health risks;
 2. transforming the supply chains towards reduction, reuse and recycling;
 3. guaranteeing the protection of the human and labour rights, and a just transition for all the workers and stakeholders involved in the plastic supply chain;
 4. advancing the shift towards the transformation of residual packaging into biocompatible and biodegradable materials;
 5. preserving and restoring the safety and sustainability of the global food system.

We therefore urge the negotiators to incorporate into the Treaty the following issues, and ask the UNEP Secretariat to duly consider them all along the INC process:

1. Decent Work for all workers along the whole plastic supply chain must be at the center

To ensure fair, safe, dignified working conditions in the production, distribution, recycling, collection and safe disposal of plastics, it is essential to uphold the [Decent Work framework - as per the definition of the ILO](#) all along the plastic supply chain, for all workers involved at any stage of the chain regardless of their employment status, including those in precarious and informal employment conditions, including wastepickers. This includes identifying and facilitating pathways towards the progressive formalization of informal workers as per the [ILO Recommendation 204](#), and as per the transformative commitment of the [New Urban Agenda \(NUA\)](#) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11. This approach means ensuring that all workers have the rights to organise and bargain collectively, to receive fair pay, to work in healthy and safe working conditions, and to access an adequate levels of social security, personal protective equipment (PPE) and lifelong training towards long-term employability and upskilling.

We urge all Parties to the Treaty to ratify and comply with the fundamental ILO Conventions including those related to occupational health and safety at work.

This also means eradicating child and forced labour, promoting gender equality, ensuring living wages, and providing safe and healthy working conditions for all workers involved in the plastic supply chain. Moreover, compliance with the ILO concept of Decent Work also means the Treaty commits to the ILO Just Transition principles at all stages of the plastics supply chain. To make this possible, Just Transition and Decent work must be implemented all along the plastic supply chain, meaning not only on the downstream part of plastic pollution (collection, sorting, recycling, and disposal) but also on the upstream part (plastic production and plastic use - to be turned into reduction, prevention, re-use and sustainable alternatives). All dimensions of the plastic value chain that contribute to



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plastic pollution, contamination, and related health risks must be tackled in a proportional, balanced and effective manner – both downstream and upstream.

2. Move away from single-use plastics towards reduction, re-use, and fully recyclable, biodegradable and biocompatible alternatives

We underscore the urgency of halting and remediating the contamination and harm caused by plastic to human and animal health and to the environment, and we stress the need to advocate for the swift adoption of sustainable production, management, collection and safe disposal practices at all stages of the plastic supply chain. This includes moving away from single-use plastics, reducing and reusing packaging, encouraging the development of low-carbon, biodegradable and biocompatible alternatives, as well as promoting efficient, safe and responsible recycling practices, greening employment, while making it safe at every stage of the process. By creating new decent, sustainable employment opportunities, this approach has a key role to play in the Just Transition process.

3. The Just Transition concept as per the ILO definition must be at the heart of the Treaty

We call for the imperative need of ensuring that the costs of this systemic, people- and planet-saving transformation shall not fall upon the most vulnerable in the plastic value chain, who are the workers. The socio-economic impacts derived from the transformation towards more sustainable packaging and waste collection and disposal practices need to be brought about in full accordance with the principle of ["Just Transition" as per the ILO definition](#). This involves supporting workers and communities affected by the transition towards a plastic-free economy, ensuring decent employment opportunities to transition away from plastic-related employment and training, (re)- and (up)skilling of workers into sustainable sectors that will replace the current system. This also means incorporating a systematic practice of bi- and tripartite social dialogue among workers organisations, governments (including local and regional governments) and employers as a mandatory rule and methodology at all stages of the negotiation and implementation of the Treaty.

4. The Treaty must be based on public health and based on WHO's "One Health" approach

We maintain that human, animal and environmental health are inextricably interconnected. We therefore support the adoption of a ["One Health" integrated approach as defined by the World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#). This involves considering the impacts of plastic pollution on the health of people, on marine and terrestrial fauna, and on ecosystems and biodiversity at large. The prevention and remediation of plastic pollution, contamination, and related health risks shall be the main objective of the Treaty and the Parties' commitments, which shall be addressed with the full participation of workers' organisation, in collaboration with public health experts, environmental and biological scientists,, toxicologists, OSH professionals and veterinarians and veterinary doctors, based on the best available scientific information.

5. Integral Waste Management Systems and Waste Services must stay in public hands and be operated on a public good approach



To ensure equitable access to quality waste services for all – the basic services that guarantee and protect public health and can ensure access to a safe, clean environment – both of which are human rights – waste services and related utilities need to be managed on a public based approach, with democratic ownership and participation of users, workers and communities; not privatized or run for profit extraction and shareholder returns. That is why we affirm that waste services and related utilities they cannot be subjected to market rules or be the object of profit.

To ensure the protection of public health and the environment, the proper management of plastic waste, and the protection of the public interest, we reject the privatization of waste management systems and infrastructure and that of its related services. Instead, we promote [their re-municipalization and de-privatisation](#), with a special role to play for local and regional governments (LRGs) in cooperation with central governments, workers unions, waste pickers organizations and local communities. Waste management services must be transparent, democratic, participatory and ran in the common interest and secure Decent Work for all workers involved in waste service provision, and must be safe and effective for nature and the planet, so that they can preserve the health of all living beings.

6. Urgent measures are needed to halt the dumping of plastic waste into the environment both land, oceans and waterways - and to decontaminate them.

States must develop, fund and implement National emergency plans to halt the dumping and contamination of plastic waste in the environment – both land and water; to de-pollute and re-nature, including addressing micro- and nano-plastics pollution as a matter of urgency. Such plans need to be drawn and implemented in cooperation with local and regional governments; independent scientists and academia; trade unions and workers representatives; business; civil society – including environmental organisations; small-scale agriculture and fishing communities, and with indigenous people. Such plans have an enormous potential to generate decent employment opportunities in highly skilled environmental services, solid waste collection and disposal; water treatment, land depollution and renaturing services - among others - and can turn the dramatic plastic waste crisis into a decent livelihood opportunity. Waste service workers can become ambassadors of sustainability, educate, raise awareness and train their communities on how to halt plastic pollution and, re-use and recycle non-biodegradable materials.

7. States need to allocate adequate levels of public funding to the transition and polluters must be held accountable for remediation

A Just Transition also means expanding and adapting social security systems to ensure coverage for all of those affected, and the provision of adequate public funding and resources to:



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- build modern, safe and efficient waste collection, management and disposal infrastructure, all while ensuring that polluters remediate the harm done to public health and the planet primarily based on corporate and investor taxation;
- invest in the Research & Development (R&D) of new forms of sustainable, low-carbon, biodegradable and biocompatible packaging that can play a critical role in the Just Transition process;
- ensure the progressive formalization of waste workers towards Decent Work including training and re-deployment in related or other sustainable industries, all while ensuring the adaptation of their communities;
- raise awareness, promote, and facilitate the change in consumption habits towards sustainable livelihoods, in line with the objectives of the transition.

8. The right of access to information for workers and civil society must be upheld

We underline the importance of transparency and the empowerment of civil society and especially workers and their organisations. We stress the critical role the right of workers and all individuals to access relevant information related to plastic pollution and its implications. The Parties should undertake to ensure that information related to the production, consumption, recovery, recycling, management, and disposal of plastics is readily available and understandable to the general public. This will enable people to make informed decisions, actively participate in the prevention and mitigation of plastic pollution, contamination, and related health risks, and foster accountability of actors involved in the plastic chain.

9. Transparency and accountability in the INC process must be enhanced; conflicts of interests in the negotiation process need to be addressed and offset

The Workers and Trade Unions Major Group expresses serious concerns about potential conflicts of interests arising from the unchecked and unbalanced participation of representatives of industries and corporations responsible for plastic pollution. In the spirit of Just Transition and social dialogue, the labour movement supports the engagement of all relevant stakeholders in the negotiation process; this includes representatives of the plastic

producing, using and collecting/disposal companies. However, there must be complete transparency regarding their vested interests, the amounts and destination of their funding in the INC process, the background of their representatives, and the representation in the INC process, which must be balanced. Commercial interests linked to companies and organisations responsible for plastic pollution are currently getting disproportionate access to the negotiation process.

10. The principle of participation and policy coherence across all different levels of government must be upheld

The Parties should commit to collaborate actively for the implementation of the proposed issues, through the formulation of coherent policies across countries and at a national level across all spheres of government, including the local, regional, national and global levels. They should also commit to good faith international cooperation, and the adequate



allocation of financial, technical and human resources, ensuring the participation of workers and their organisations through prior meaningful consultation, and social dialogue.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) is the global voice of the world’s working people representing 200 million workers organized in 337 affiliated organisations in 167 countries and territories. <https://www.ituc-csi.org>

IndustriALL Global Union represents 50 million workers in 140 countries in the mining, energy and manufacturing sectors and is a force in global solidarity taking up the fight for better working conditions and trade union rights around the world. <https://www.industrialall-union.org>

Public Services International (PSI) is the global union federation representing over 30 million workers organized in more than 700 trade unions in 154 countries. Our members, two-thirds of whom are women, work in social services, health care, municipal and community services, central government, and public utilities such as water, electricity and solid waste collection, management and disposal. We bring their voices to the UN, ILO and other regional and global organisations. We defend trade union and workers' rights and fight for universal access to quality public services. <https://publicservices.international>

The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) is the global trade union federation representing and organizing over 10 million workers organized in 425 affiliated trade unions in 127 countries. IUF members work across the food chain from agriculture and plantations, to the factories processing and manufacture of food and beverages, hotels, restaurants, tourism and catering services.

The International Alliance of Waste Pickers (IAWP) is a union of waste picker organizations representing more than 460,000 workers across 34 countries. Our members participate 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 settings. The Alliance will defend their work and its recognition, in pursuit of public policies that improve the working and living conditions of the recyclers of the world <https://globalrec.org>