



## Local and Subnational Governments Coalition to end Plastic Pollution: Statement towards INC-4 of the Global Plastics Treaty

### Preamble

In a historic decision at the fifth United Nations Environment Assembly in March 2022, Member States agreed, through the resolution 5/14 entitled ‘End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument’, to establish an intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) to develop an international legally binding agreement on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, that addresses the full life cycle of plastic by the end of 2024.

Local and Subnational governments (LSNG)<sup>1</sup> are deeply concerned about the triple planetary crisis; this includes the environmental challenges that result from unsustainable production, consumption, and life-cycle management of plastics. Also of great concern is the negative impacts that plastics and plastic pollution has on human health and the environment. While global plastic production has risen exponentially in the last decades, to more than 460 million tons<sup>2</sup> per year, only an estimated 9% has been recycled<sup>3</sup>. Of the 8.3 billion tons of plastics produced since the 1950s<sup>4</sup>, 79% has ended up in landfills or seeped into the environment<sup>5</sup>. Plastics make up 85% of marine debris, and are amongst the largest, most damaging, and long-lasting type of waste<sup>6</sup> <sup>7</sup>. In a business as usual scenario, plastic waste is estimated to increase more than 300 % by 2060<sup>8</sup>, and, greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) associated with the production, use and disposal of conventional fossil fuel-based plastics is forecast to grow to approximately 2.1 gigatons of carbon dioxide equivalent (GtCO<sub>2</sub>e) by 2040<sup>9</sup>.

Addressing plastic pollution is a complex issue, involving multiple sources, actors and stakeholders; this requires a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to deliver effective solutions.

LSNGs are on the front line of the plastic pollution crisis and are already experiencing its effects, including increased flood risks, airborne toxicants, marine litter and risks to wildlife. LSNGs share the perspective of the need for an ambitious plastic treaty and underline the importance of reducing plastic production and consumption, supporting a sustainable and safe

<sup>1</sup> Local Governments' include all levels of government below the subnational, national or federal level which includes: prefectures, districts, counties, municipalities, cities, towns, communes, etc. Subnational Governments' include: states, provinces, domains, territories, regional governments, and applies only to the first immediate level of government below the National Government.

<sup>2</sup> *Global Plastics Outlook*, February 22, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1787/de747aef-en>.

<sup>3</sup> “Plastics,” European Environment Agency’s home page, September 18, 2023, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/topics/in-depth/plastics>.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, *From Pollution to Solution: A Global Assessment of Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution* (Nairobi, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> UNEP, “Our Planet Is Choking on Plastics,” Visual Feature | Beat Plastic Pollution, accessed 2024, <https://www.unep.org/interactives/beat-plastic-pollution>

<sup>6</sup> *Global Plastics Outlook*, February 22, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1787/de747aef-en>.

<sup>7</sup> *World Economic Forum and Ellen MacArthur Foundation and McKinsey & Company, “The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the Future of Plastics,” How to Build a Circular Economy*, 2016, <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/the-new-plastics-economy-rethinking-the-future-of-plastics>.

<sup>8</sup> *Global Plastics Outlook*, February 22, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1787/de747aef-en>.

<sup>9</sup> *Global Plastics Outlook*, February 22, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1787/de747aef-en>.



circular economy to protect human health and the environment, and ensuring the environmentally sound management of plastic waste, while ensuring a just transition.

Emphasising that plastic pollution, in marine and other environments, needs to be tackled urgently, together with its impacts, and recognizing the major role of Member States in the negotiation process and their competencies, we urge concerted consideration for the inclusion of cities, local and subnational governments, as key partners and implementers to address global plastic pollution.

### **Why do LSNGs need to be included?**

LSNGs need to be considered as key partners for shaping the instrument, as local and subnational governments will play a critical role in the delivery of the Plastic Pollution Treaty, for the following reasons:

1. **Closest level of government to the people:** LSNGs are well positioned to address local nuances that ultimately become national challenges or opportunities. LSNGs have to be adequately enabled to access national and international financial resources, further develop their local expertise and participate in the development of national-level implementation plans, policy and other related documents. They are bearing both the brunt and responsibility for the increasing amount of problematic plastics that are showing up in their waste streams and urban environments;
2. **Regulatory powers:** LSNGs often have locality-specific regulatory powers and the ability to enhance implementation and enforce actions. This ability to develop locality-specific and enabling regulations can be used for plastic prevention, production, use, and waste management at a local level;
3. **Replicating and scaling:** LSNGs can effectively contribute to ongoing and new initiatives, replicate and scale sustainable best practices, successful case studies, and support capacity building of local stakeholders;
4. **Knowledge creation:** LSNGs can effectively enable the promotion of locally sourced relevant scientific research, while facilitating engagement with key stakeholders to implement the treaty, and enable the exchange of information and technological innovation to reduce plastic pollution, including in the marine environment;
5. **Consumption in urban areas and impacts:** The vast majority of consumption that results in plastics pollution occurs in urban-centres around the world. LSNGs are amongst the first to be impacted by plastic pollution as it has a negative impact on the quality of urban environments, increases cleaning costs, reduces the efficiency of infrastructure (e.g. plastic pollution clogging stormwater drains) and negatively impacts the health of its residents and the natural environment;
6. **Operational Implications:** Any agreement that national governments enter into on waste, will ultimately have an impact on LSNGs. This is due to these levels of government largely owning and managing the infrastructure needed for waste collection and management, this will ultimately include plastics waste;
7. **Emissions reduction potential:** Many LSNGs around the world have developed Climate Action plans, or similar strategies that direct cities' mitigation interventions. Integrating these strategies or plans with a focus on reducing plastic related greenhouse gas emissions becomes imperative as we transition to a net-zero future;
8. **Inclusivity:** LSNGs can have a key role for an inclusive and participatory approach in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of common global obligations and possible national action plans (NAPs). LSNGs also foster social dialogue with key stakeholders, including formal and informal workers, to enact regulations that promote a whole of society approach; and
9. **Just Transition:** As a result, in the process of closing the tap on plastics, vast swathes of industries will be impacted. The treaty must be rooted in the principles of a just

transition to mitigate, among others, any negative impacts on the lives of workers and residents. LSNGs are key to ensuring that the livelihoods of workers and residents are safeguarded. Local actors are well equipped to work with workers, or their representatives, and employers in social dialogue to build inclusive green workforces in which career-track, decent jobs and training are widely accessible for workers in the fossil fuel industry, informal workers, women, youth, people experiencing poverty and marginalised communities.

## Call for action

We, Local and Subnational governments call upon Member States to:

I. Take ambitious and effective measures to include Local and Subnational Governments in the intergovernmental negotiation process;

II. Ensure that the new legally binding instrument addresses the imbalance of the plastic value chain, by establishing global rules and regulations across the full lifecycle of plastics, places accountability and appropriate measures upstream, and reduces the risk that cities responsible for waste management face by the uncontrolled accelerating growth in plastic waste generation;

III. Recognise the key role of Local and Subnational Governments in addressing plastic pollution in the future international legally binding instrument; and explicitly place that recognition throughout the text and obligations of the plastic treaty, which will also enable Local and Subnational Governments to support the implementation of the instrument while taking into account financial and other resources that local and subnational governments will require;

IV. Lend support, which can include endorsement, to the Local and Subnational Governments Coalition;

V. Ensure that the established Major Groups and other Stakeholders mechanism within the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is included in the instrument, and enabled for any mechanism that follows the ratification of the instrument; and

VI. Deliver an ambitious international legally binding instrument to put an end to plastic pollution that can be successfully implemented, for the benefit of residents, workers, the natural environment, and a sustainable economy and the right of future generations to live on a healthy planet and sustainable planet. These measures should be, among others, to:

- minimise, and where appropriate ban, the production and use of plastics that are problematic, avoidable and the most harmful to human health and the environment, especially single use plastic products. Ensure the adoption, implementation and utilisation of systems that promote a circularity and the circular economy in a way that protects the environment and human health. The treaty should include requirements regarding the design and content of products to ensure that all products could be properly segregated, collected, reused, refilled, repaired, and recycled by LSNGs and do not impact human health and the environment. Standards and requirements should also be set for all systems and operations;
- Ensuring that pollution is minimised through the improvement of waste management and other measures to limit pollution. We are calling for measures that ensure the improvement of waste management systems and the

availability of funds for the environmentally sound management and disposal of plastic waste that could not be eliminated in a safe way; and

- A just transition approach embedded in all elements and interventions should be applied. All stakeholder groups should be included in the negotiations, including workers in the fossil fuel industry and informal waste workers to ensure that their experience and challenges are recognised and part of the discussions. Financial support, including concrete finance for a just transition and social protection, and technical support for Local and Subnational Governments should be provided to ensure that they have the means to implement the treaty.

## Local and Subnational Government Coalition Partners

### Convening partners:



### Core partners:

