



**Local and Subnational Governments Coalition to end Plastic Pollution:  
Statement towards INC-5 of the Global Plastics Treaty**

*as of 19 September 2024*

**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<sup>2</sup>; 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>3</sup> per year, only an estimated 9% has been recycled<sup>4</sup>. Of the 8.3 billion tons of plastics produced since the 1950s<sup>5</sup>, 79% has ended up in landfills or seeped into the environment<sup>6</sup>. Plastics make up 85% of marine debris<sup>7</sup>, and are the largest, most damaging, and long-lasting type of waste<sup>8</sup>. In a business as usual scenario, plastic waste is estimated to increase more than 300% by 2060<sup>9</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>10</sup>.

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<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> Climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss.

<sup>3</sup> *Global Plastics Outlook*, February 22, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1787/de747aef-en>.

<sup>4</sup> "Plastics," European Environment Agency's home page, September 18, 2023, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/topics/in-depth/plastics>.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, *From Pollution to Solution: A Global Assessment of Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution* (Nairobi, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> UNEP, "Our Planet Is Choking on Plastics," Visual Feature | Beat Plastic Pollution, accessed 2024, <https://www.unep.org/interactives/beat-plastic-pollution>

<sup>7</sup> *Global Plastics Outlook*, February 22, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1787/de747aef-en>.

<sup>8</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,

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

<sup>10</sup> *Global Plastics Outlook*, February 22, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1787/de747aef-en>.



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 with plastic waste accumulating and clogging drainage systems, 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 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 local and subnational governments, as key partners and implementers to address global plastic pollution.

## Why do LSNGs need to be recognized?

LSNGs can advise on opportunities to shape the plastic pollution treaty in such a way that enables and facilitates their ability to contribute to its implementation. LSNGs are critical to delivering on 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 some responsibility for the increasing amount of problematic plastics that are showing up in their waste streams and urban environments;
2. **Financial implications:** LSNGs are facing increased pressure to manage plastic waste and pollution that threaten the environment and health of their residents. To avoid burdening LSNGs with these rising costs, policies and laws must minimise plastic waste and pollution, and hold producers responsible and accountable for managing their plastic products and packaging around the world;
3. **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 to improve the circular economy, extended producer responsibility, and to prevent and reduce plastic pollution by reducing plastic production and consumption, improving reuse, reparability, and recycling, as well as waste management at the local level;
4. **Public Service Delivery:** With their applied practical experience in developing and delivering actions and public services, LSNGs provide insightful feedback to help design government legislation and implementation actions;



5. **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;
6. **Knowledge creation:** LSNGs can effectively enable the promotion of locally sourced relevant scientific research and data, including waste and litter composition, 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;
7. **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;
8. **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 having the mandate, and owning and managing the infrastructure needed for waste collection and management, this will ultimately include plastics waste;
9. **Emissions reduction potential:** Many LSNGs around the world have developed Climate Action Plans, or similar strategies that direct GHG emission mitigation interventions. Integrating these strategies or plans to include plastic-related greenhouse gas emissions becomes imperative as we transition to a net-zero future;
10. **Just Transition:** The treaty must prioritise a just transition to support, protect and care for workers and residents from potential socioeconomic and environmental impacts. As the closest government to residents, LSNGs are crucial in safeguarding livelihoods and facilitating the shift to a green economy. With their unique understanding of local dynamics, LSNGs promote community engagement and social dialogue to build inclusive workforces and drive the creation of good, green jobs, ensuring the participation of fossil fuel industry workers, informal workers, women, youth, people experiencing poverty, Indigenous peoples, and marginalised communities..



## **Call for action**

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

I. Ensure that all negotiations are completed during INC-5, and a globally binding plastics treaty is adopted before the conclusion of INC-5.

II. Take ambitious and effective measures to ensure the intergovernmental negotiation process recognizes the role of Local and Subnational Governments in delivering on the goals of international environmental agreements, and supports empowering their continued leadership;

III. 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 that reduce high risk plastic products and materials and promote a circular economy, places accountability and appropriate measures upstream, and reduces the risk and burden that cities are responsible for, including waste management faced by the uncontrolled accelerating growth in plastic waste generation;

IV. Recognise the key role of Local and Subnational Governments in addressing plastic pollution, within a whole-of-governance framework that is led by the principle of subsidiarity, in the future international legally binding instrument. This includes but is not limited to: regulation, program delivery and data collection; 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;

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

VI. 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

VII. 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, circular economy and the right of future generations to live on a healthy 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 circularity and the circular economy in a way that protects the



environment and human health and accessibility. The treaty should include requirements regarding the design and content of products to ensure that all products can be properly segregated, collected, reused, refilled, repaired, and recycled by LSNGs and do not impact human health or accessibility and the environment. Standards and requirements should also be set for all systems and operations.

- Ensure that pollution is minimised through the improvement of waste management and other measures to limit pollution. We are calling for measures that dramatically reduce plastic waste and pollution, ensure the improvement of waste management systems, hold producers responsible and accountable for reducing and managing their plastic waste globally, and the provision of funds for the environmentally sound management and disposal of plastic waste; and;
- Embed a just transition approach in all elements and interventions. All stakeholder groups should be included in the negotiations, including LSNGs, workers in the fossil fuel industry and informal waste workers, and persons with disabilities, 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.