

SUBMISSION FROM THE INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WASTE-PICKERS FOR INC-2 ON PLASTIC POLLUTION

TEMPLATE FOR SUBMISSIONS

Name of country (for Members of the committee)	
Name of organization (for observers to the committee)	International Alliance of Waste-pickers
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1. Substantive elements

1. Objective(s)

a) What objective(s) could be set out in the instrument?

Proposed Objective:

Just transition for waste-pickers and other workers in the plastic value chain.

Explanatory Text:

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, indigenous communities, and climate refugees. 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 by that work, we 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 recognizing the role we play in plastic waste management and are establishing norms mandating waste-picker integration and partnership in waste management. These countries include Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, India and South Africa. We are getting contracts from municipal authorities to engage in the domain of waste management. We are

SUBMISSION FROM THE INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WASTE-PICKERS FOR INC-2 ON PLASTIC POLLUTION

being viewed as popular environmental educators and organizers in the fight for environmental justice and rights. Such engagements can be viewed as components of **Just Transition**.

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. To take the UNEA 5.2 resolution forward, we request member states to include Just Transition as one of the objectives set out in the legal instrument. The definition of Just transition evolved by representatives of waste-pickers from all over the world is provided below for reference:

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, waste-pickers and other workers under informal and cooperative settings 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 must build and improve upon systems that waste pickers have already established while guaranteeing, better and decent work, social protection, more training opportunities, appropriate technology transfer, support for infrastructure and organizing of workers, and greater job security for workers at all stages of the plastic value chain, waste-pickers and other workers in informal and cooperative settings, and all workers affected by plastic pollution. Its specific outworking will depend on local context and local consultation. Just transition framework should emphasize supporting waste-pickers and other workers who are most vulnerable to occupation disruption from waste management investments and climate change.'* The just transition 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 submissions to the Secretariat.

2. Core obligations, control measures and voluntary approaches

- a) *What core obligations, control measures and voluntary approaches would provide a comprehensive approach to addressing plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, throughout the full life cycle in line with the future objective(s) of the instrument?*

Core obligations:

- **Recognizing waste pickers as key players to deal with plastic pollution** by obligating member states to respect the basic human rights of waste pickers, including setting basic standards for the conditions and fair payment that waste pickers are provided for carrying out their livelihoods and services. The recognition of waste pickers also includes defining waste pickers in the future legal instrument, as it will set the precedent for mandatory integration of waste

SUBMISSION FROM THE INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WASTE-PICKERS FOR INC-2 ON PLASTIC POLLUTION

pickers in plastic waste management plans instituted by governments at the national, provincial and local levels. A definition of waste-pickers is provided here for your reference: *‘Waste pickers constitute most of the 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. As a part of recognizing waste-pickers work, we request that member states must adopt the ‘Leave No One Behind’ report¹ prepared by UN-Habitat, as it provides details of waste-pickers’ contribution to recycling, challenges faced by waste-pickers and ways to involve waste-pickers in dealing with plastic pollution.

- **Member states must include Just Transition for waste-pickers and other workers in plastic value chains in their national action plans to deal with plastic pollution.** Just transition includes the integration of waste-pickers in present and future waste management systems set up by national, provincial and municipal authorities, by designing the system based on their needs and expertise, while also providing better working conditions, opportunities for advancement in value chains and planning processes, fair remuneration and social protection. Waste pickers need financial support to reach the levels of organization and training necessary to participate in planning processes. Involving waste-pickers in plastic waste management, and paying them fairly for the same, will help reduce plastic pollution and ensure the social inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable workers.

Control measure:

- **Phase out non-recyclable plastics and plastics which are hazardous to human health.** Non-recyclable plastics comprise the largest share of plastic pollution.
- **Encourage the usage of truthfully labelled mono-polymer and recyclable packaging materials to ensure increased recycling rates.** Consult waste-pickers, workers, and actors in the informal plastic value chain while designing new plastic products.
- Ensure that all materials have value and that the public has access to those materials and their commercialization points. Waste pickers that are unable to organize themselves into contracts for service providers should not be excluded from accessing and marketing materials, as this limits overall material recovery as well as safety net livelihood opportunities.
- Mandate doorstep waste collection for all residents, including those in informal settlements, as well as litter collection, as core obligations of plastic waste management policy. The jobs for performing these services should be reserved for waste picker groups, especially those seeking formal contracts and those in need of a Just Transition out of landfills.
- Ensure transparency about solid waste management contracts, budgets, materials recovery rates and opportunity distribution in the waste management system, to better allow vulnerable actors to strategize their Just Transition and to better enable ongoing research on inclusion in the waste management system.

¹ [Leaving No One Behind report](#)

SUBMISSION FROM THE INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WASTE-PICKERS FOR INC-2 ON PLASTIC POLLUTION

- **Mandatory government-led taxation of producers for Extended Producers Responsibility Programmes (EPR), and partnership with waste-pickers and their organizations for implementing EPR.** Governments should regulate, implement, monitor, and enforce EPR obligations or taxes on producers, for governments to directly finance inclusive waste management. Taxation or EPR obligations must be instituted as a part of National Action Plans for reducing plastic pollution. Governments should collect a tax on producers to pay them for the costs of implementing municipal recycling and waste management programs with social inclusion. Government bodies should have clearly defined roles in any framework so that there is no confusion about responsibilities. EPR should ultimately be mandatory such that it covers the full costs of waste management, with clear, gradual and measurable targets and consistent enforcement. Even where voluntary, EPR should engage the government. Waste picker integration provisions should not be relegated to the charity or grant-making wing of government or producer operations but, rather, should be structurally funded as part of the system. Further, EPR should recognize the essential role of informal waste-pickers and should maintain and expand existing infrastructure and integrate existing workers and actors from informal plastic value chains. EPR should maintain or establish safe and legal entry points for all waste pickers, to collect and market materials, while also supporting low-barrier pathways to the organization, and work in more formal and secure labour conditions. EPR should include enforceable mandates and targets for the integration of informal waste pickers and their organizations in EPR systems and on all decision-making bodies. EPR should prioritize the contracting of waste picker organizations, especially Membership-based Organizations with democratic processes that maximize employment and financial distribution of profits within their ranks. There should be ease of registration for waste picker organizations, aggregators, reprocessors and others in the informal or grassroots recycling chain to register as formal service providers.

I. Implementation elements

1. Implementation measures

- a) How to ensure implementation of the instrument at the national level (eg. role national action plans contribute to meeting the objectives and obligations of the instrument?)*
- b) How to ensure the effectiveness of the instrument and efficient national reporting?*
- c) Please provide any other relevant proposals or priorities here on implementation measures (for example for scientific and technical cooperation and coordination as well as compliance).*

- National action plans to deal with plastic pollution should include the planning and financing of a Just Transition for waste-pickers and other workers in the plastic value chain. The planning for just transition must include research and mapping of waste-pickers and other workers in the plastic value chain. A thorough and systematic research and mapping process, including an enumeration of informal waste pickers, should be conducted before the planning and

SUBMISSION FROM THE INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WASTE-PICKERS FOR INC-2 ON PLASTIC POLLUTION

implementation of interventions that disrupt waste management systems and players. Identifying stakeholders and their involvement in planning and implementation should be considered a key component of Just Transition. Periodic studies should be conducted to assess equity and opportunity distribution and inform changes to the system. At the international level, member states should report on the work on Just Transition every three years.

- National action plans should include taxation of producers or Extended Producers' Responsibility (EPR) policies that reimburse governments for the costs of implementing an inclusive waste management system. There should be reporting by member states on the enforcement of these efforts and the enumerated involvement of waste pickers in planning and implementation processes.

2. Means of Implementation

Concerning means of implementation, document UNEP/PP/INC.1/5 covers the following elements: capacity-building, technical assistance, technology transfer on mutually agreed terms and financial assistance.

a) *What measures will be required to support the implementation of the instrument?*

Means of implementation of the core objective of Just Transition:

Universal survey and registration of waste-pickers

- Universal survey of waste-pickers, their working conditions, and aspirations for the future as a part of Just Transition.
- Issuing occupational identity cards to all the waste-pickers after or as part of a universal survey.
- Setting up a database of waste-pickers based on the universal survey at local, provincial and national levels. The database can be used for partnerships with waste-pickers to engage in plastic waste management, Extended Producers' Responsibility, and for extending social protection programmes to waste-pickers.

Capacity Building

- Training of municipal and other public officials to learn about the role and contribution of waste-pickers in plastic waste management and ways to ensure a Just Transition.
- Training waste-pickers and other workers to upgrade their public policy and negotiation skills for participation in planning for Just Transition and involvement in Extended Producers' Responsibility. Further, skills upgradation to advance in value chains as a part of Just Transition.

Intellectual property rights and technology transfer

- **Protection of Intellectual Property Rights of the knowledge, systems, and technologies created by waste-pickers and other workers** in informal plastic value chains by building new systems from what already exists and ensuring a central role for existing actors in the informal waste and recycling sector.
- **Recycling and reuse technology transfer should be based on the needs of waste-pickers and other workers in the plastic value chain.** Technology transfer should be appropriate to the existing labour force in the plastics value chain and enable efficiency and more decent and safe

SUBMISSION FROM THE INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WASTE-PICKERS FOR INC-2 ON PLASTIC POLLUTION

work in decentralized collection, mechanical recycling and reuse/repair systems without displacing existing workers. Technology transfer should prioritize south-south exchange since many global south countries are achieving higher recycling rates than in the north.

- **Rejecting false solutions such as incineration and pyrolysis** and ensuring that they are not included in national action plans to deal with plastic pollution or in Extended Producers' Responsibility.

II. Additional input

Please provide any other relevant proposals or priorities here (for example introductory elements; awareness-raising, education and exchange of information; research; stakeholder engagement; institutional arrangements and final provisions).

ENGLISH

- **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 (INC) 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 financially support the participation of at least 6 waste pickers from different parts of the world, as the work of waste pickers varies across 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.
- **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. The proposed cluster can build on the Group of Friends of Waste-pickers launched in INC-1 under the chairpersonship of the South African delegation². Representatives from more than 20 countries participated in the launch of the Group of Friends of Waste-pickers.

² 'Group of Friends of Waste Pickers' is inaugurated during the INC-1 in Uruguay.
<https://globalrec.org/2022/11/29/group-of-friends-of-waste-pickers/>