

Tuesday 13 of October 2020

Dear President of UNEA5: H.E. Mr. Sveinung Rotevatn,

Dear Bureau members of UNEA5: H.E. Ms. Bérangère Abba, H.E. Mr. Goran Trivan, H.E. Ms. Andrea Meza Murillo, H.E. Dr. Mohammed Bin Dainah, H.E. Reggy Nelson, Ms. Laksmi Dhewanthi, Mr. Ado Lohmus, H.E. Mr. Bassiere Batio Nestor, Hon. Ms. Barbara Creecy,

Dear Acting Chair of the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics (AHEG): Mr. Satoru Iino,

Dear Co-chairs of Open Ended Working Group (OEWG) Resolution 73/333: Mr. Ado Lohmus and H.E. Ms. Saqlain Syedah,

*Dear Chair of the CPR: H.E. Mr. Fernando Estellita Lins de Salvo Coimbra
And Dear Members of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR),*

We the undersigned organisations and groups are writing this letter to share our views and concerns on certain agenda items which will have cascading implications in light of a two-phase UNEA5.

It is both understandable yet unfortunate that UNEA5 and the open-ended CPR originally planned for February 2021 have to be modified due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. While it is not easy, it is important to maintain global environmental decision-making, as the negative effects on our planet's health are not slowing down. We would like to highlight the need to maintain momentum towards two important processes - on improving the global response to plastic pollution, and on global environmental governance.

As we understand the proposal for a UNEA5 and OECPR in 2021, only the organisational elements of UNEA5 will be discussed virtually in February 2021, such as the Medium-Term Strategy, associated Programme of Work (PoW), and budget and the GEO review process. All discussion of resolutions will be postponed until an in-person meeting can be safely held in 2022.

The undersigned stakeholders are all very active in, or strongly supportive of, the processes on Marine Plastic Litter and Microplastics (UNEP/EA.4/Res.6) and UNGA Resolution 73/333 (formerly known as Global Pact for the Environment). We would like to ask you to strongly consider the idea of discussing these urgent topics in the first part (virtual) of UNEA5 (2021) rather than postponing them entirely to the (physical) part of UNEA5 planned for 2022. The latter - postponing all discussions until 2022 - would mean a delay of an entire year on matters of urgent environmental and public harm, which is unacceptable for those ongoing processes near to a final, long-awaited agreement.

Marine Plastic Litter and Microplastics

If current trends in plastic use and production continue unabated, the impact on humanity and the planet will be catastrophic. According to the most recent studies - published just in the last weeks and months - we are releasing into the oceans more than 10 million tonnes of plastics annually, on top of the 150 million tonnes that already circulate in our environments. We strongly support the need for ongoing meaningful discussions on the policies and

responses necessary to address this urgent problem. Plastic pollution damages health, nature and the economy, and we can only prevent these impacts by addressing the issue with the importance it deserves.

Delaying a decision to start developing a new global treaty on plastic pollution would allow millions more tonnes of plastics into our marine ecosystems by the year 2022. While an in-person UNEA5 and OECPR meeting in 2022 would be the most fruitful and inclusive approach for these political discussions, we strongly support the ongoing intersessional gatherings, both virtual and in-person, planned for 2021 to maintain momentum toward urgent global policy solutions.

Resolution 73/333 OEWG

Resolution 73/333 requires a political declaration for February 2021, to strengthen the implementation of international environmental law and environmental governance. Delaying negotiations to 2022 would be irresponsible and unnecessary. In 2021, we should not only have a political declaration, but also the roadmap towards an action plan on how to achieve the objectives defined in that declaration, to avoid Stockholm+50 being only “nice words” without concrete actions. We must have a more meaningful political declaration. The environmental emergency is too serious to delay this process.

Even as we make alternative plans for mass gatherings like UNEA5 in 2021, the global community should not delay all work on Resolution 73/333, or the response options to the Marine Plastic Litter and Microplastics crisis, especially with so much already done. Work on these two critical issues must continue. And, while no specific decisions can be expected during February 2021’s UNEA5 ‘part 1’, the final output from the meeting must ensure that concrete discussions and the urgently needed progress towards addressing Marine Plastic Litter and Microplastics and international environmental law and governance are enabled and supported.

We appreciate your attention on the concerns outlined above, and urge you to consider how a more substantive agenda for ‘part 1’ of UNEA5 in February could be achieved.

Sincerely,

On behalf of a number of organisations from the Major Groups of NGOs, Trade Unions, Children & Youth, Women

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Deysi Martinez (Little Sisters of the Assumption, USA)
Ana Barreira (Instituto Internacional de Derecho y Medio Ambiente/International Institute for and the Environment)
Anohar John (TFINS)
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Severin SINDIZERA (Association pour l'Intégration et le Développement Durable au Burundi, AIDB, indigenous forum NGO) and (Indigenous Peoples Global Forum for Sustainable Development, IPG FforDD, indigenous peoples platform)
Rohan Dominic (Fondazione Procede Internazionale-onlus)
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Donatus Lili (Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd)
Olga Speransakya and Alexandra Caterbow (Health and Environment Justice Support)
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