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## Cheat sheet: A Treaty on Plastic Pollution

3 May 2024

**Governments are currently negotiating a treaty on plastic pollution. This cheat sheet provides an overview of the key players and issues at stake in the negotiations.**

### What is the problem with plastics?

Every day, the equivalent of 2000 garbage trucks full of plastics are dumped into the world's oceans, rivers and lakes. With global plastic production forecast to triple by 2060, the problem of plastic pollution is expected to sky-rocket, with disastrous consequences for wildlife, human health, marine ecosystems and coastal communities.

Plastics released into the environment do not disappear. Instead, water, wind, sunlight and heat break plastic items down into smaller particles known as microplastics and nanoplastics. These particles often carry toxic chemicals, which, when ingested, can damage cells in the human body, leading to cancers, lung disease and birth defects.

Scientists have estimated that an average person eats 5 grams of microplastics in a week—about the weight of a credit card.

Around the world, waste management systems are proving incapable of dealing with the rapidly growing flow of plastic waste. This has led a majority of countries to call for a treaty that deals with the problem *at source*.

### What is the treaty supposed to cover?

A decision to start negotiations on a treaty solving this problem was adopted by all UN Member States at the UN Environment Assembly in March 2022. The negotiating mandate stipulates that the treaty will “promote sustainable production and consumption of plastics” based on “a comprehensive approach that addresses the full life cycle of plastics”.

A majority of countries therefore call for the treaty to regulate plastics along its entire life cycle—from production of primary plastic polymers, to production of high-risk plastic products and plastic chemicals, product design, waste management and environmental clean-up. A small but intransigent minority have, since the first negotiation session, tried to limit the scope of the treaty to waste management and clean-up only. The question of the new treaty's scope has been one of the most contentious topics in the negotiations. The question of the new treaty's scope has been one of the most contentious topics in the negotiations.

## What is the schedule of the negotiations?

At a preparatory meeting in Dakar, Senegal, in May 2022, it was decided that the committee would meet five times, according to the following negotiating schedule:

- [First negotiation session](#), Punta del Este, Uruguay, November 2022
- [Second negotiating session](#), Paris, France, May 2023
- [Third negotiating session](#), Nairobi, Kenya, November/December, 2023
- [Fourth negotiating session](#), Ottawa, Canada, April 2024
- Fifth negotiating session in Busan, South Korea. November/December, 2024
- Possible Diplomatic Conference, 2025.

The UN Environment Assembly has asked the negotiation committee to conclude the text of the treaty by end of the fifth negotiation session in December 2024, with treaty adoption foreseen to take place at a Diplomatic Conference in 2025. However, the draft text of the treaty currently contains more than 3500 text brackets, which have led countries and observers to question whether the committee will be able to conclude the negotiations in time.

## Who is chairing the negotiations?

The treaty-making process is currently chaired by Luis Vayas Valdivieso, Ecuador's Ambassador to the United Kingdom. Up until the third negotiation session in Punta del Este, Uruguay, the negotiations were chaired by Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, Peru's Ambassador to the United States.

## Who are the leaders?

The High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution, a cross-regional group of 64 countries, have portrayed themselves as the progressive bloc in the negotiations. Co-chaired by Rwanda and Norway, the group calls for the treaty to include binding provisions to restrain and reduce the production and consumption of plastics to sustainable levels, including by banning unnecessary, avoidable and problematic plastic products and plastic polymers and chemicals of environmental or health concern.

## Who are the blockers?

A group of oil and plastics producing countries are seeking to limit the scope of the new treaty and water down its obligations. The group, known as "The Like Minded Group" or "The Low Ambition Countries", includes Saudi Arabia, Russia and Iran. It has close ties to the oil and petrochemical industry, and has objected to any proposal that would tackle plastic pollution at source. Instead, the group advocates a nationally-driven treaty focused on waste management and environmental clean-up. The United States is not a member of the group, but also advocates a "bottom-up" instrument modeled on the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.