

**April 22, 2024**

All parties and delegates  
Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee  
United Nations Environment Programme

**Declaration to the United Nations Environment Programme's Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) ahead of their 4th session (INC-4)**

**Subject: Commemorating Earth Day 1970 and Urging Bold Action to Strengthen the Global Plastics Treaty**

On this 22nd day of April 2024, on the occasion of the 54th Earth Day, we, the undersigned, representing collective voices of concerned citizens, environmental advocates, frontline communities, and stakeholders from around the world, submit to the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) convened under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme, this **Declaration** in support of a robust, ambitious, equitable, and just Global Plastics Treaty.

Fifty-four years ago, on April 22, 1970, in one of the largest mass demonstrations to date, 20 million people took to the streets to voice their concerns about the environmental degradation of our planet. This first Earth Day marked a major milestone of the modern era of the movement to protect our environment and our communities. Notably, it was sparked by a growing awareness of the impacts of environmental destruction, industrial pollution, biodiversity loss, toxic chemicals, and waste proliferation.

The first Earth Day was not just a celebration of the environment, but a demand to protect it, and a popular insistence for urgent action. While realizing that much more needs to be done to realize the vision, and that environmental justice is tragically elusive and unevenly shared, many modern environmental protection policies enjoyed in many parts of the world were borne out of the collective demands of the first Earth Day, as well as demands in subsequent years. These benefits include modernizing sewage treatment systems, strengthening environmental enforcement, banning certain highly toxic pesticides, implementing controls on air pollution, as well as policies to better address oil spills and solid waste pollution. There is clearly much more to do, but that hard work continues to this day, as we build toward a cleaner, healthier, more sustainable, and more just future.

In 1990, on its 20th Anniversary, Earth Day had expanded to include 141 nations and over 200 million people. Key elements addressed included the deteriorating ozone layer and the growing threat of global climate change. Indeed, the 1992 Rio de Janeiro **United Nations Conference on Environment and Development** can be traced in part to the outpouring of public sentiment leading up to Earth Day in 1990. Further, the **Paris Agreement**, signed on Earth Day 2016, can be traced to escalating demands in those subsequent years, including at the 40th anniversary in 2010. The demand for action continues, as indicated by estimates of over one billion people participating in Earth Day in 2020, on its 50th anniversary.

Today, as we reflect on the origins, intentions, and achievements of Earth Day events in 1970, 1990, 2010, 2020, and each of the other years, we are confronted with serious, growing, and interrelated crises of global climate change, petrochemical proliferation, and plastic pollution.

The official theme of Earth Day 2024 is "**Planet vs. Plastics**". We simply cannot let plastics win this struggle. The INC stands at a pivotal moment in history as it undertakes the crucial task of negotiating the terms of the global plastics treaty - or a "[international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment](#)" as it is referred to in UNEP Resolution 5/14, signed on March 2, 2022. These negotiations may represent our last, best chance to enact meaningful change to curb the tide of plastic and petrochemical pollution, the unjust poisoning of communities and the environment, and to foster a true circular economy that values environmental justice, reuse, conservation, innovation, producer responsibility, and ultimately the **End of the Plastic Era**.

As representatives of the global community, we urge the INC to approach these deliberations with a sense of urgency and purpose, recognizing the global nature of the crisis, the interconnectedness of environmental issues, social justice issues, and climate change, the imperative for binding, enforceable commitments to action to unequivocally reduce to the maximum extent possible, the threats of global plastics and petrochemical pollution in all their forms, as well as the injustices, degradation, sicknesses, and death that are created as a result. We call upon member states to demonstrate vision, leadership, ambition, and solidarity in pursuit of a robust and effective treaty that addresses the full lifecycle of plastics, from fossil fuel extraction to petrochemical production, to disposal.

In view of the above we advocate for provisions that:

**Use a human rights-based approach for the negotiation of the plastics treaty**, including centering the knowledge, voices, and experiences of people living on the frontlines of the crisis, Indigenous Peoples, workers, youth, and other rights-holding constituencies.

**Ensure that the treaty includes enforceable provisions across the entire "life cycle" of plastics**, addressing the extraction-to-petrochemicals-to-microplastic-and-incineration pipeline, requiring strict limits to reduce the proliferation of petrochemicals and eliminating false solutions that obfuscate the toxic pathways of plastic proliferation.

**Require Reduction, Reuse and Prevention:** By adoption of sustainable alternatives, eliminating single-use plastics, and promoting reuse, non-toxic ecological design and non-plastic circular innovation.

**Overhaul Waste Management and Recycling:** By investing in evidence-based systems to reduce leakage, address injustices to waste workers and communities, and end waste colonialism while overhauling ineffective and misleading recycling systems, and ending environmental dumping of plastic.

**Mandate Producer Responsibility:** By holding producers accountable for the full life cycle and environmental impact of their products, and promoting transparency and accountability throughout the supply chain.

**Strengthen International Cooperation and Accountability:** By fostering collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and capacity-building among nations, as well as technology transfer, financial support for developing countries, and regulation of international waste trade.

We call on INC delegates to affirm a commitment to the principles of environmental justice, stewardship, social equity, and intergenerational justice. Let us honor the legacy of Earth Day and this historic moment by seizing this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to secure a safe, equitable, just, sustainable and non-toxic future for all human beings and all living things on Planet Earth.

Signed,

Waterkeeper Alliance, USA/Global

Center for Coalfield Justice, USA

Descendants project, USA

Bargny Coast Waterkeeper, Sénégal

Réseau des Associations pour Protection de l'Environnement et de la Nature (RAPEN), Sénégal

Solidarité ci Sutura, Sénégal

Surfrider Foundation, USA

EARTHCARE, The Bahamas

Plastic Pollution Coalition, USA

The Last Plastic Straw, USA

Fenceline Watch, USA

Green Africa Youth Organization, Uganda

Association For Promotion Sustainable Development, India

TEAL Climate, USA/Canada

National Hawker Federation, India

Sustainable Environment Development Initiative, Nigeria

2050 Pictures, USA

Ottawa Riverkeeper, Canada

Fondation Race for Water, Switzerland

Port Phillip EcoCentre, Australia

Katiba Institute, Kenya

No More Butts, Australia

Women Engage for a Common Future, WECF, Germany

Greenish Foundation, Egypt  
Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, Tanzania  
ESDO-Environment and Social Development Organization, Bangladesh  
Tangaroa Blue Foundation, Australia  
Alaska Community Action on Toxics, USA  
Basel Action Network, USA  
Consumers' Association of Penang, Malaysia  
Sahabat Alam Malaysia (Friends of the Earth), Malaysia  
Center for Biological Diversity, USA  
SRADeV Nigeria, Nigeria  
Gallifrey Foundation, Switzerland  
Thant Myanmar, Myanmar  
Green Vientiane, Laos  
Fundación PlastiCo. Project, Ecuador  
Red de Acción por los Derechos Ambientales RADA, Chile  
Fundacion El Arbol, Chile  
Taller Ecologista, Argentina  
Reaccion Climatica, Bolivia  
Red Mexicana de Acción Ecológica, Mexico  
Eco Circular India Foundation, India  
Retorna, Spain  
Recycle Hawaii, USA  
Hanai Kaiaulu, USA  
[EARTHDAY.ORG](http://EARTHDAY.ORG), USA  
Plastic Free Future, USA  
Community Action Against Plastic Waste (CAPws), Nigeria  
ECOTON - Ecological Observation and Wetlands Conservation, Indonesia  
River Warrior Indonesia, Indonesia  
Waterkeepers Bangladesh, Bangladesh  
Dhoritri Rokhhay Amra (DHORA), Bangladesh  
Centre for Citizens Conserving Environment & Management (CECIC), Uganda