

Partnerships Day

The fourth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee

“This is the year to seize the opportunity to finalize this international agreement on plastic pollution, a once-in-a-generation moment to create a world free of plastic pollution.”

– Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Canada

“When there is something worthwhile being done, there is one and only one reason it gets done - people of courage, people of conviction, people of commitment come together with the will to get it done.”

– Dr. Adil Najam, President, WWF-International.

On April 22, 2024, high-level representatives of countries, rightsholders, partners and stakeholders across the world gathered in Ottawa, Canada, for Partnerships Day — an event co-hosted by the Government of Canada and WWF — to share ambitious visions and specific commitments towards the development and future implementation of the new international legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution (‘the treaty’).

The Partnerships Day — co-hosted by the Government of Canada and WWF — facilitated the exchange of diverse perspectives in the global fight against plastic pollution, including of national and sub-national governments, Indigenous Peoples, scientists, youth, women, local communities, and the businesses and finance sector. The event coincided with Earth Day and took place ahead of the official start of the fourth session of the Intergovernmental **N**egotiating **C**ommittee to develop the treaty (‘INC-4’) on April 23, to highlight the importance of an INC process that encourages a whole of society and multistakeholder dialogues throughout the negotiations and in recognition of the importance of amplifying multistakeholder action, consistent with the UNEA Resolution 5/14.

Throughout the day, speakers voiced their concerns on the worsening plastic pollution crisis and emphasised their steadfast dedication to develop and implement an effective and ambitious treaty to end plastic pollution. The overarching message was resoundingly clear, that a treaty with legally binding global measures, addressing the full life cycle of plastic, supported by sustainable financing—a treaty that prioritises the wellbeing of our environments and communities—is in the interest of all. Anything less would perpetuate the harm already facing the most vulnerable and marginalised communities across the world. A call for continued political engagement was clearly heard and Germany announced its desire to host a Ministerial meeting alongside Canada, Ecuador, Ghana, and others in advance of INC-5.

Existing scientific evidence more than justifies the strong, legally binding measures that the treaty must establish. As discussed in the panel on research-based policy to end plastic pollution, plastic pollution is killing our wildlife, destroying our ecosystems, worsening climate change, and entering the air that we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat. The threat of plastic pollution to



the wellbeing of our planet and communities is already proven with available science, and it demands urgent action.

Speakers emphasized that the treaty must prioritize key control measures, including the elimination and reduction measures of problematic, avoidable and harmful plastic products and chemicals of concern, mandatory product design requirements and standards, remediation efforts and environmentally sound waste management measures. Additionally, an implementable and inclusive treaty would require adequate financing from the public and private sectors, stakeholder engagement, and gradual strengthening mechanisms.

Speakers representing youth, women, waste pickers and local communities also discussed the significance of the voices and active participation of marginalised communities in the treaty negotiations and implementation. A successful treaty, as emphasised by many panellists, is one that provides for an inclusive and just transition to a non-toxic circular economy that protects the environment and human health from the adverse impacts of plastic pollution.

To this end, the unique rights and knowledge systems of Indigenous Peoples must be recognised and upheld throughout the treaty negotiation process, and as part of the science that informs its implementation. The treaty must also uphold the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Rio Principles. Ethical and equitable engagement, together with measures to monitor and evaluate how human rights are being affected by plastic pollution, must be part of the treaty negotiations and implementation.

Speakers emphasised the importance of means of implementation in realizing agreed-upon global rules for a future free from plastic pollution. To achieve the ambitious goals and binding measures of the treaty, comprehensive financial mechanisms must direct public and private financial flows away from polluting practices, and towards the implementation of harmonised global rules, standards and solutions across the plastic lifecycle. At the event, Norway announced that the country has set aside 90 million US dollars for the next four years, in addition to the 145 million US dollars already contributed in the last six years to combat global plastic pollution.

Underscoring the important role of local and sub-national governments, the Government of Quebec and the Government of Catalonia, alongside partners, announced the establishment of the Local and Subnational Governments Coalition to End Plastic Pollution, which currently counts 40 members, and called on other jurisdictions across the world to join the membership.

To better enable Canadians to reduce plastic waste and pollution, the Government of Canada announced the establishment of a Federal Plastics Registry, which will require companies to report annually on the quantity and types of plastic they manufacture, import, and place on the market and how it flows through the economy and is managed at end of life. Throughout the day, speakers also shared lessons learned from other multilateral environmental agreements. The experiences in negotiating and implementing the Montreal Protocol on Ozone-Depleting Substances, and the Basel, Stockholm and Rotterdam (BRS) Conventions emphasise the need



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to “start and strengthen” and to take decisive actions on critical issues to guide the INC process and the implementation of the future treaty to end plastic pollution.

Speakers also recalled the historic adoption of the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) at the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its linkages to the treaty, including its targets for the global reduction of pollution and the enablement of sustainable consumption choices. As Partnerships Day came to a close, the Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change of Canada, encouraged participants to bring the “sense of hope and determination” in this event into the negotiations in the coming days, by coming together and focusing not on the differences but what unites us.