

There is no escape: How plastic pollution violates Human Rights.

Access to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a human right. The environmental degradation caused by plastic pollution compromises this right. Globally, more than 400 million tons of plastic are expected to be produced by the end of 2025, impacting both the global north and the global south. Of this, an estimated 364 million tons are expected to end up in oceans or in landfills. In 2024 plastic pollution within the marine environment resulted in the death of over 100 000 marine mammals and 1 million seabirds, in 2025 these numbers are expected to increase.

Every stage of the plastic cycle generates plastic pollution that threatens the effective enjoyment of human rights. To that end, the Human Rights Council has explicitly recognised the link between human rights and a healthy and clean environment. However, the global plastic crisis cannot be viewed solely as an environmental issue, but rather as a matter directly affecting human dignity.

Plastic pollution violates the human right to bodily integrity by introducing microplastics and harmful chemicals into the body, which cause cellular damage, inflammation, and hormonal disruption. Each year an additional amount of an estimated 40 million tons of micro plastics are released into the marine environment, where they are consumed by fish and other sea creatures, ultimately ending up in markets where they risk being consumed by the public.

What makes plastics toxic are chemical additives added during the production process intended to to change or enhance their performance, functionality, or other properties. Currently, plastic producers around the world are not required to identify chemical additives in their products. Preventing governments across the globe from drafting meaningful legislation on regulation relating to the production process.

Understanding the active harm it produces, the international community continues to work towards developing a global framework to eliminate plastic pollution. Though negotiations toward a resolution were not successful this session, the outcome should

not be regarded as a failure, but rather as a delayed milestone in our collective journey to defend human rights.

The Human Rights Council reaffirms its commitment to working with all member states and international organizations to draft a resolution to safeguard our collective future.

“This is not about closing a treaty at any cost. It is about closing a wound that we’re leaving open in people’s lungs, in our rivers, in our oceans.” Juan Gómez Head of Panamanian delegation to INC-5.2

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