

Report back from thematic side event during INC-4

Theme: Enabling Just Transition

Ottawa, Canada

25 April 2024

Number of participants: 171 delegates (of which 58% women)

Key messages resulting from the event:

- a. Speakers highlighted that a **just transition includes a range of interventions to secure workers' rights and protect the environment** (the main reference being the [ILO Guidelines for a Just Transition](#)), such as opportunities for communities affected by plastic pollution, training and upskilling processes, ensuring occupational safety and health, and expanding social protection and social security systems.
- b. Speakers emphasized the **severe human rights impacts of plastic pollution, across the whole lifecycle of plastics**, including on the right to life, health and safety, adequate standards of living, food, water, cultural rights, or access to information and justice. Speakers emphasized the need to adopt a **human rights-based approach to a just transition, grounded in the human right to development**, to avoid infringing further the rights of those who might be left behind during the transition towards more sustainable production patterns.
- c. Speakers also highlighted **the central role that waste pickers play in the recycling and waste management systems**. Workers, many of whom operate in the informal sector and are suffering the health and safety impacts of wastes, collect, sort, and process plastics, with a critical lack of recognition, including financial, for their critical contribution to waste and environmental impact. For example, one speaker highlighted that, since the start of the Treaty negotiations, 51 million tons of plastic have been collected by waste pickers in Latin America. There is a growing call for waste pickers to be represented in the decision-making, including in the Treaty negotiations, and for the recognition of their rights, including their right to a healthy environment. It is key to ensure they are part of the solutions to transition towards more sustainable materials, reuse, refill, and repair-based systems, and that they benefit from supportive resources (i.e., training and capacity-building for safer and more sustainable waste management practices).
- d. Speakers also emphasized the need to **consider Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized groups, such as children, youth, and women to achieve a just transition**. Indigenous Peoples often live in remote locations, away from waste management systems. Speakers have recalled the need to provide them with access to financial means, assistance and funds to successfully manage plastics and fulfil the Treaty provision. Similarly, the Treaty must also recognize that the transition will disproportionately impact children, including child waste pickers, families, and vulnerable communities who might need additional support to implement the Treaty provision, such as through re-education, training, and inclusion in decision-making processes.
- e. Speakers **called on governments to play a central role in just transition**, to address the new market opportunities that will arise from the Treaty implementation, as well as the short-term challenges that will emerge, such as temporary price increase and employment shifts. Governments have a role to play in fostering labour market improvements, minimizing disruptions, enabling conditions, environments, and incentives for enterprises (including for enterprises' viable investment in circular business models), improving waste management systems, and developing Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes. Moreover, coordinating with existing international frameworks (e.g., ILO Guidelines, ILO International Labour Standards, UNFCCC), accommodating national circumstances

and differentiated implementation timelines, capacity building and knowledge transfer, access to technologies, and dedicated financing will be crucial in that transition.

Key policy considerations:

- The Plastics Treaty should **encapsulate a just transition that puts people at the center (following the ILO guidelines)**, ensuring that workers, including those in the informal sectors, communities, Indigenous Peoples, and groups in vulnerable situations affected by environmental harms and actions to address plastic pollution are protected.
- The treaty must make clear that a **just transition applies to the entire lifecycle of plastics and requires safeguarding the rights of workers, including in informal sectors, their communities, Indigenous Peoples, and people in vulnerable situations.**
- The Treaty should recognize **that just transition towards an environmentally sustainable economy must be grounded in human rights** and recognize the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment and a safe working environment for workers and communities across the plastic lifecycle.
- **Decent work and social justice, including through extending social protection and occupational safety and health to workers in informal and precarious work**, should be crucial priorities in the context of just transition.
- While the Treaty should **account for national circumstances and contexts and ensure that those responsible for plastic pollution pay the costs** of the harm it causes, **governments must be key actors of the just transition.** It is crucial to align with existing frameworks, such as the ILO Guidelines and the UNFCCC, prioritize labour market improvements (in terms of job creation, skills development, education), minimize disruptions through supportive environments and incentives for enterprises, improve waste management, and develop Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes.
- It will be important to **secure language on financing for a just transition.** Such financing would support the social aspects of the implementation of the Treaty, including providing support to workers and micro-enterprises negatively affected, providing income support as may be required, and facilitating job transitions through reskilling and upskilling of workers.
- Similarly, it is crucial **that sufficient funding is ensured to support groups in vulnerable situations** who could be impacted by measures to address plastic pollution, including women, children, youth, Indigenous Peoples, waste pickers and other workers, local communities, amongst others.
- **Just transition must be operationalized in cooperation with businesses**, ensuring that progress and benefits they create during the transition are accessible to and shared with the people and communities on which they depend.
- The **role of social dialogue and the need to engage with social partners**, notably workers and employers' organizations, is critical to ensure a balanced and validated approach to just transition. The ILO can assist its tripartite constituents and broader stakeholders to ensure key policy areas of the just transition are implemented and operationalized towards the broader goal of social justice for all.

Resources

- [OHCHR and ILO, Key Messages on Human Rights and Just Transition](#)
- [ILO, Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all](#)
- [ILO, 111th International Labour Conference, Resolution concerning a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all](#)

Annex I: Agenda of the event with presenters and titles

13.30-13.35 - *Welcome*

- **Dr. Halshka Graczyk**, International Labour Organization (ILO)

13.35-13.40 - *Opening remarks*

- **Dr. Mihir Kanade**, Member of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

13.40-13.55 - *Panel discussion 1*

- **Mr. Adalberto Maluf**, National Secretary of Urban Environment and Environmental Quality, Brazil, Ministry of Environment, Brazil
- **Ms. Lisa Qiluqqi Koperqualuk**, Inuit Circumpolar Council
- **Dr. Adetoun Mustapha**, International Science Council
- **Dr. Daniel Ramos**, World Trade Organization

13.55-14.05 - *Panel discussion 2*

- **Ms. Barbra Weber**, representing the International Alliance of Waste Pickers
- **Ms. Jadira Vivanco**, Fundación AVINA
- **Mr. Aminur Rashid-Repon Chowdhury**, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)
- **Mr. Mario Galbert**, Ocean Science and Governance, Children and Youth Major Group to UNEP (CYMG)

14.05-14.20 - *Panel discussion 3*

- **Ms. Jodie Roussell**, Business Coalition for a Global Plastics Treaty
- **Dr. Evar Umeozor**, PhD, King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center (KAPSARC)
- **Ms. Daniela Stange**, International Air Transport Association (IATA)
- **Mr. Robert Marinkovic**, International Organisation of Employers (IOE)

14.20-14.40 - *Questions & Answers*

14.40-14.45 - *Closing*