

SUBMISSION BY THE AFRICAN GROUP ON POTENTIAL RESPONSE OPTIONS TO COMBAT MARINE PLASTIC LITTER AND MICROPLASTICS FROM ALL SOURCES

Context

Since the creation of the ad-hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter (AHEG) in 2017, through UNEA resolution 3/7, UN member states have explored barriers and options for tackling the problem of marine plastic pollution.

African States have contributed actively to these discussions, both individually and as a group. And as we pointed out in a joint African Group statement at the Third AHEG meeting in Bangkok in November 2019, the problem of marine litter and microplastics is a threat to our region as it has serious economic, ecological and social consequences that can derail our progress towards a sustainable development future.

In the Durban Declaration, adopted at the 17th African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN) in November 2019, African States also committed to “supporting global action to address plastic pollution which will require further work to engage more effectively on global governance issues on plastic pollution, including reinforcing existing agreements and the option of a new global agreement on plastic pollution that takes a comprehensive approach to addressing the full lifecycle of plastics”.

Purpose

This submission further develops the views of the Group regarding possible global response options, including by considering some of the elements that could form part of a new and strengthened global governance structure to address the problem of plastic pollution.

Regional situation

Africa is a leader in taking action on management of plastics, and nearly half of all States in Africa have introduced legislation aimed at tackling plastic pollution, including by prohibiting certain leakage-prone products like plastic bags. However, this has come with some challenges such as influx of plastics from other regions through porous borders, inadequate enforcement and loss of jobs. The effects of these efforts have been further limited by the lack of a dedicated and coherent international regulatory framework. Tackling plastic pollution requires a comprehensive and multilayered approach.

In short, and as also stated at the Third AHEG meeting in Bangkok in November 2019, there is a limit to how much we can achieve on national level alone, and that is not only the case for African States. Plastic pollution is a transboundary issue, not just because millions of tons end up in the ocean every year, beyond national jurisdiction, or because plastic that is discharged in one country can end up as litter or even as precipitation in another country. The entire value-chain of plastic is transboundary, with global trade in raw

materials, global trade in manufactured products and global trade in collected plastic waste.

A stronger global response is therefore needed to enable the success of national initiatives. The voluntary initiatives that have been put in place over the past decades have fallen short, and the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans are not set up to deal with global supply chains, design standards or recycling requirements. Partly as a result of this, a growing number of States, including the African Group, have, over the past two years, signalled an interest in exploring the option of a new legally binding agreement.

Possible elements in a new global governance architecture or agreement

1. **Shared vision:** Building on the zero-vision agreed to in UNEA resolution 3/7, the international community should articulate a clear goal of eliminating all discharge of plastic into the ocean, directly or indirectly, based on the principle of precaution and in recognition of the devastating impact plastic pollution has on ecosystems and livelihoods.
2. **Reduction targets:** Based on an agreed calculation method, the international community should set a clear and measurable reduction target, to be reached by a certain year.. The common reduction target should also be translated into national reduction targets, in an equitable manner, based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. It will be important to ensure, however, that the sum of national commitments are sufficient to achieve the common objective, something that other environmental issues have struggled with. Moreover, we believe that urgency is needed in the near-term in line with SDG 14.1 (“by 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, particularly from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution”).
3. **National action plans:** In order to improve long-term planning, predictability for business, and promote transparency, the new global governance architecture should facilitate the development of national action plans, which would serve as planning tools in efforts to achieve the national reduction targets. National action plans are also useful in terms of adapting policy measures and regulatory interventions to local and national context.
4. **Monitoring and reporting:** A new global governance architecture should provide for an agreed measurement, reporting (covering plastic production, use and management at the national and international level in order to measure progress toward a safe circular economy for plastics and the elimination of leakage.) and verification scheme for tracking marine litter and microplastics discharge and the progress made to eliminate them at a national and international level.

5. **Scientific body:** Monitoring of national discharge should be supplemented by the establishment of a dedicated international scientific body with a mandate to assess and track the extent of the problem, and collect state-of-the-art knowledge to provide inputs for decision-making and implementation.
6. **Implementation support:** A new global governance structure or agreement must include a system for supporting States in their efforts to achieve their reduction targets. This should include a financial mechanism and a scheme for transfer of technology and expertise.
7. **Common rules and regulations:** The international community should strive to develop common calculation methods, definitions, standards and regulations for an efficient and coordinated global effort to combat plastic pollution. To the extent that certain policy measures, such as banning primary microplastics in cosmetics or phasing out of certain single-use plastic items, are considered meaningful by a majority of States, the new global governance architecture should provide a platform for adopting uniform regulatory measures applicable to all States. Particular attention should be given to those categories of plastic products that are most prone to leakage and that pose a particular risk to the environment, including single-use plastics, fishing gear and primary microplastics.

Suggestions for national or local response options

1. Regulatory or governance measures:

- Subscribe to the provisions of the National Coastal Plans and add to them a section related to marine litter in the context of the protection and preservation of the coastal ecosystems.
- Introduce taxes on the disposal of waste in the natural environment.
- Pooling efforts and creating synergies between various partners, and establishing national agencies dedicated to the coast with an entity dedicated to the issue of marine and microplastic waste if necessary.

2. Operational measures:

- Carry out collection campaigns at the beaches throughout the year and raise awareness among municipalities to introduce this waste as part of the National Household Waste Collection Programs, taking into account the collection time which must be before high tides to prevent litter from ending up at sea.
- Promote improved waste management systems (upstream sorting, recycling and recovery).
- Encourage managers in the private sector to set up companies dedicated to the recycling and recovery of plastic products through subsidies, and / or public / private partnerships.
- Strengthen reception facilities in ports and involve fishermen in the collection of waste at sea.

- Encourage coastal communities to obtain the “Blue Flag” label by improving waste management in their beaches.
- Make sure to cover all the beaches with the waste collection service (ideally selective),

3. Awareness raising measures:

- Strengthen the capacities of developing countries in general and of African countries in particular in terms of fundraising for pilot and development projects aimed at implementing the aforementioned operational measures in their countries, while creating job opportunities and improving the standard of living of the population.
- Continue and strengthen efforts to raise awareness among citizens of the impacts of marine litter in order to reduce their production upstream.
- Strengthen and perpetuate efforts to raise awareness and educate the environment on the issue of marine litter at beach level, for the benefit of all the public and schools.
- Encourage the development of ICT tools and information and awareness-raising materials for the general public, especially for young people.
- Support managers of marinas to obtain the “Blue Flag” label

Conclusion

UNEA-5 delivers the solution to move this forward by providing the negotiation mandate for a new legally binding instrument to combat plastic pollution.

The African Group is committed to engaging constructively in the discussions on this issue going forward, and we welcome the recent establishment of a Group of Friends on marine plastic pollution in New York. We also have high expectations for an ambitious outcome from 5th session of United Nations Environment Assembly, which should pave the way for strengthened global action to address the problem of plastic pollution.