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Statement by the International Labour Office

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Madam president, excellencies, distinguished delegates,

The International Labour Office welcomes the initiative towards an international agreement on plastic pollution.

Plastic has become the workhorse of the modern economy and is found in all aspects of modern life, including the world of work. While providing significant benefits, the current production, including extraction, use, and disposal of plastics has many drawbacks. Plastic production includes several chemicals that can affect workers' health and safety.

It is indispensable and urgent to transform the “take-make-waste” of plastics' economy into a circular economy, based on a thorough and full-life-cycle approach.

This will not only reduce the environmental damage. It will also open new opportunities for decent work.

The ILO estimates that a shift to carbon-neutral and circular economies could generate an additional 100 million jobs by 2030.

We must take a human-centred approach to combatting plastic pollution and remember that decent work is a cornerstone of the SDGs and should be so in a circular economy too.

Millions of women and men work in the plastic industry, through its entire value chain such as oil and gas, petrochemical, industrial chemical industries, from production to transformation, collection, and recycling.

At the same time, the sad reality is that the handling of plastic waste remains largely part of the informal economy in many countries.

Workers face serious decent work deficits, such as work-related safety and health hazards, discrimination, violence and harassment, low earnings, with no access to adequate social protection.

Addressing these gaps will greatly enhance opportunities for decent work. Therefore, the ILO's constituents – governments and employers' and workers' organizations – through social dialogue, have an important role to play to support a just transition.

Several International Labour Standards provide building blocks in the journey towards a global agreement on plastics.

Labour policies on skills and enterprise development, employment-intensive job creation and formalization of work, occupational safety and health, cooperatives, and the social and solidarity economy are essential.

The ILO is pleased to continue to work with UNEP and other international organizations in a multilateral system towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all.

Thank you for your attention.