



Azul
1701 Rhode Island Ave NW
Washington, DC 20036

March 20th, 2024

The Honorable Anthony Blinken, Secretary
Department of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, DC 20451

Dear Secretary Anthony Blinken,

On behalf of Azul, we are writing to you to urge the United States to support a strong and ambitious Global Plastics Treaty that addresses the full life cycle of plastic. Numerous studies have determined that plastic is everywhere—in marine environments, fenceline communities, produce, and inside our own bodies.—Now is the time for the Department of State to act on this imminent crisis, and it is crucial that the United States take a leadership role in the treaty negotiations to ensure that the final outcome is as ambitious as the task itself.

In November, 2022, 175 nations agreed to develop an internationally and legally binding agreement on plastic pollution by 2024, prompting a major step towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions from plastic production, use, and disposal.¹ In the past two years, we have developed the carcass for what is considered to be the most unique opportunity to eradicate plastic pollution and establish an international standard for environmental justice. With less than a year to go until the final stage of negotiations, we believe that the treaty does not live up to the expectations and objectives set out by UNEP, as there is a lack of regulatory, environmentally sustainable, and internationally binding language in the body of the instrument.

Plastic pollution is a growing crisis with a devastating impact on human health and human rights. This is a multi sectoral issue which proposes threats to the rights of Indigenous People, environmental justice, biodiversity, and climate. According to the National Academy of Sciences, the U.S. is the top producer of plastic waste in the world—generating 42 metric tons of waste every year.²—In addition to the impacts this waste has on the environment in the United States and globally, its production and incineration creates further hazards to human health and the environment.

¹<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/historic-day-campaign-beat-plastic-pollution-nations-commit-develop>

² <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/26132/chapter/1>



The incineration of plastics creates Persistent Organic Pollutants (POP), which in turn directly harms the health of communities that are adjacent to incineration facilities. This practice leads to respiratory problems, organ failure, and a reduced life expectancy.³ Towns like Newman, California; Kingfisher, Oklahoma; Clinton, Illinois; and Camden, New Jersey are just a handful of the over 100 communities across the United States are being impacted by the production and incineration of plastics.⁴

Plastics are also directly linked to the climate crisis, given their production from fossil fuels. An international [coalition of independent scientists](#) states that “Studies estimate that plastics account for around [three to eight percent] of global GHG emissions, and it is projected to double by 2060. Estimates indicate that plastics and other petrochemicals industries will drive half of the growth in demand for fossil fuel production by 2050.”

For all of these reasons and for the Plastics Treaty to be successful in reducing plastic pollution across the plastics life cycle, truly protect human health, and minimize climate impacts, it must address the following eight priority areas:

- Substantially reduce aggregate global plastic production to protect human and environmental health, upholding human rights for current and future generations, and respecting planetary boundaries.
- Prioritize the reduction of plastics and expand the implementation of reuse systems rather than relying on recycling, bio-based, biodegradable, compostable plastics, and non-plastic alternatives.
- Establish transparency standards that include a complete identification, elimination, and traceability of chemicals, including polymers, that are hazardous or of concern, across the full lifecycle of plastics to regulate these chemicals by group based on the no data no market principle.
- Eliminate highly problematic plastic products and materials.
- Develop and implement tailored measures to prevent microplastic pollution at source and across the full lifecycle of plastics, including alternatives and substitutes.
- Apply the zero waste hierarchy, applying the prevention and precautionary principles to chemicals, polymers, and plastic products and their alternatives and substitutes across their full lifecycle, and prohibit waste management technologies and systems assessed as unsafe, unsustainable, non-transparent, and non-essential by an independent expert subsidiary body of multi stakeholders under the instrument.

³ Calil, J. et al. (2017). Neglected: Environmental justice impacts of marine litter and plastic pollution. Azul, UNEP. <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/neglected-environmental-justice-impacts-marine-litter-and-plastic-pollution>

⁴ Map of commercial waste combustors in the U.S. | US EPA. (n.d.-b). <https://www.epa.gov/hwgenerators/map-commercial-waste-combustors-us>



- Include a strong financial mechanism that adheres to the zero waste hierarchy to facilitate the flows of financial resources from the developed to the developing world, particularly for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs).
- Establish a multistakeholder science-policy interface (including rightful knowledge holders and socio-economic expert groups) as a subsidiary body of the instrument established with the support of a robust conflict of interest policy.

Moreover, at the heart of the issue is the need to respect planetary boundaries in order to protect life on Earth while upholding human rights for current and future generations. The provisions of the treaty must also ensure a just transition for communities and workers across the plastics lifecycle—including waste pickers—and guaranteeing meaningful engagement of vulnerable groups, impacted communities, and Indigenous People. Many of these demands require comprehensive measures to ensure an effective treaty with strict baseline assessments, timebound targets, accurate reporting, and swift evaluation mechanisms. Only by addressing each of these priorities will the new treaty be truly comprehensive and just.

Given the Department of State's jurisdiction over international treaties, we urge the Office of Treaty Affairs and Secretary Blinken to act swiftly and cooperatively in search of the first internationally binding law that enforces the reduction of plastic pollution. Furthermore, with the support of the administration, this agreement would mean that the United States can abide by the 2030 sustainable development goals set by the Biden Administration. We know Secretary Blinken to be a champion of environmental justice, human rights, and sustainability; thus, we strongly encourage the Department the support needed to make this historic agreement possible, enforceable, and accountable.

We thank, admire, and appreciate you for your work on this vital topic, which needs urgent attention and conversation.

Sincerely,

Marce Gutiérrez-Graudiñs
Founder / Executive Director