

November 25, 2024

GRULAC Observer Statement

The fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment (INC-5)
Busan, South Korea

Thank you, Chair, and thank you distinguished delegates,

As we conclude these negotiations, I want to highlight a critical issue regarding the language of the Global Plastics Treaty, specifically how it disproportionately impacts communities in the Global South. While the Treaty sets ambitious global goals for eliminating plastic pollution, the current language is often ambiguous and non-binding. This presents a significant challenge for countries in the Global South—countries that already face severe economic, social, and environmental challenges.

For example, the lack of binding obligations in the Treaty may overlook the unique circumstances of small island developing states (SIDS) and countries reliant on industries that are heavily dependent on plastics. According to the UN Environment Programme, SIDS are especially vulnerable to the impacts of plastic pollution, with limited resources for waste management and recycling infrastructure, making it difficult for them to meet the global standards set by the Treaty. Without clear, enforceable mechanisms for financial support, technology transfer, and capacity-building, these nations may be unable to comply with the same obligations as their counterparts in the Global North. As a result, this could exacerbate existing inequalities—particularly when it comes to participation in financing mechanisms, access to technology, and the creation of national action plans.¹

Moreover, while the global focus on ocean solutions is critical, the current negotiations do not sufficiently address the specific needs of the Global South. Oceans in your region, home to fragile ecosystems and vulnerable communities, are disproportionately affected by plastic pollution. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) estimates that nearly 80% of marine debris originates from land-based sources, with developing nations often bearing the brunt of this pollution. Yet the proposed solutions in the Treaty fail to provide tailored support or the necessary resources to make real progress.²

It is crucial to acknowledge that the Global North cannot be relied upon to shoulder the burden of solving these challenges for the Global South. As the UN's Global Environment Outlook warns, external aid is often inconsistent and insufficient to address the scale of the crisis.³ Therefore, we must prioritize sustainable, context-specific solutions that empower countries in your region to take ownership of their environmental futures, rather than

1 UN Environment Programme, “The Role of Small Island Developing States in the Plastics Crisis”, 2021.
2 IUCN, “Plastic Pollution and Its Impact on Marine Biodiversity”, 2020.
3 UN Environment Programme, “Global Environment Outlook”, 2019.

depending on external support that may not materialize. The Treaty must ensure that the Global South has the resources, capacity, and flexibility needed to tackle plastic pollution independently and effectively.

Azul strongly encourages GRULAC to continue advocating for a Treaty framework that recognizes the capacity constraints of developing countries and provides the tools necessary to address the urgent challenges of plastic pollution. Specifically, Azul urges GRULAC to support the introduction of production reduction caps. Relying on broad, ocean-centric solutions, trade-focused legal language, or the uncertain commitments of external actors will not create the comprehensive framework required to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to the UN, without clear regulatory action on production reduction, the global plastic waste crisis will continue to worsen, and SDG 14 (Life Below Water) will remain out of reach.⁴

The Treaty must prioritize stronger financial and technical support mechanisms, alongside the flexibility to ensure that responsibilities are shared equitably. For the Treaty to be truly effective and just, it must align global objectives with the specific needs and realities of the Global South, ensuring that no country is left behind in the fight against plastic pollution.

Thank you.

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Founder and Executive Director of Azul

4 United Nations, “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, 2015