



Global Plastics Treaty Talks Report

Palais des Nations, Geneva, August 5-14, 2025

by Melanie Collette, CFACT



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Executive Summary

From August 5 to 14, 2025, delegates from 184 countries gathered in Geneva to negotiate a global plastics treaty. The discussions ended without reaching a consensus on key issues. While the Legal Drafting Group made progress only on administrative “tail” articles (Depositary, Signature, Authentic Texts), negotiators remained divided over production controls, chemicals and polymers of concern, and the strength of product and waste obligations. A 12-page “landing-zone” draft issued by the Chair on August 13th narrowed or deferred upstream measures (e.g., no production-target article, fewer strict mandates), prompting strong pushback from high-ambition delegations and major NGOs, as producer-aligned states continued to resist prescriptive obligations. With nearly all substantive chapters still heavily bracketed, the compiled CRP.1 text remains the most comprehensive map of options heading into the next steps. The push for global production caps relies on uncertain models, while the real bottleneck is weak waste systems—not how much plastic is made.

Who’s Pushing the Treaty and Why

The proceedings were led by INC Chair Ambassador Luis Vayas Valdivieso and the UNEP INC Secretariat. Negotiations were influenced by blocs, including the High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution and a similar group of producers; the latter was active on the floor (e.g., Kuwait speaking for the group; supported by Russia, Malaysia, Iran, Morocco, India, Cuba, and Kazakhstan). The corridors were filled with observers from various sectors—business and industry, municipal and subnational networks, scientists, Indigenous representatives, youth and women’s groups, human-rights bodies, and trade associations. By the opening day, more than 3,700 participants had registered from 184 countries and over 619 observer organizations; UNEP later reported over 2,600 participants present in Geneva—the difference reflects registered versus in-person attendance, according to an [August 5th press release](#).

The goal of this conference was to develop a legally binding instrument to “end plastic pollution” throughout the entire life cycle—a mandate derived from [UNEA Resolution 5/14](#). The agenda covered everything from upstream measures on production and chemicals to product design rules, EPR/financing, and the details of MRV/compliance. Work sessions included a mix of plenaries, contact groups, and an open-ended legal drafting group, with live negotiations documented in the [in-session document index](#).

[UNEA Resolution 5/14](#) calls for a legally binding treaty to address plastics “across the full life

cycle,” establishing a policy foundation for a global agreement. Additionally, OECD 2060 modeling warns that plastics use could nearly triple by 2060 without stronger coordination, reinforcing UNEP’s push for a global framework. Since pollution and waste trade cross borders, the UN advocates for harmonized approaches covering design, production, use, and waste, while allowing flexibility for different national contexts. UNEP’s [“Turning off the Tap”](#) report emphasizes the need for systemic change, including speeding up efforts to redesign products, boost reuse, and improve recycling efficiency to reduce leakage across the value chain.

Concerns about health and exposure to microplastics support a precautionary approach, alongside enhanced monitoring and safer product design, despite noted gaps in evidence. Economically, the treaty aims to standardize disclosure and traceability, align financing for circular economy investments, and promote capacity-building and technology transfer in regions with weak waste systems. Ultimately, supporters argue a binding treaty would provide legal clarity and accountability by establishing minimum standards for design and chemicals; mandating measurement, reporting, and verification (MRV); and creating compliance mechanisms to prevent nations from undercutting each other.

Despite the UN's insistence and the enthusiasm of its supportive attendees, these arguments are riddled with gaps and shortcomings in the evidence: major health claims rely on micro/nano plastics research that leading reviews still consider data-poor and methodologically inconsistent ([WHO 2019](#); [WHO 2022](#); [FAO 2024](#); [EEA 2025](#)); the main system-change pathways are based on scenario exercises whose methods acknowledge uncertainty, unvalidated datasets, and sensitivity to assumptions ([UNEP 2023](#); [OECD 2022](#); [Pew/SYSTEMIQ 2020](#); [Lau et al., 2020](#)); and the push for harmonized global rules is itself a response to non-transparent chemical content, incomplete value-chain data, and weak MRV baselines, repeatedly flagged by UN bodies ([UNEP/BRS 2023](#); [BRS/UNEP/FAO 2023](#); [UNEP 2021](#); [UNEP/UNECE 2023](#)). Even the core measurement infrastructure is still under development (e.g., new reference materials to standardize microplastic monitoring), highlighting that the evidence base remains uneven and should be approached with skepticism ([EC JRC 2025](#)).

Conference Agenda

August 4, 2025: UNEP Executive Director, INC Chair, and INC Executive Secretary Conversation with Observers

Observers advocated for cradle-to-grave system transparency, such as calls for “a globally harmonized system for transparency and traceability of chemicals in plastic materials throughout their entire lifecycle.” Several statements referenced [UNEP \(2023\)](#) and [Pew/SYSTEMIQ \(2020\)](#) to support upstream controls. An Indigenous representative urged “phasing down fossil fuel extraction and production of plastics and chemicals,” and called for financial mechanisms to ensure a just and equitable transition.

August 5, 2025 Opening Plenary — Part 1

Interventions combined procedural housekeeping with high-energy appeals from both delegates and observers. The UNEP Executive Director described the mission as to “set the world on a path to end plastic pollution forever.” Evidence cited in this session included [UNEP](#)

(2023) [“Turning off the Tap,”](#) which several speakers used to frame systems-change pathways and potential leakage reductions. As mentioned earlier, scenario-based modeling, reliance on inputs aligned with [Pew/SYSTEMIQ \(2020\)](#), and sensitivity to policy adoption and behavior limit the reliability of this report.

An observer emphasized health and justice, calling plastic pollution “a human health emergency and a justice issue,” with reports of microplastics found in placentas and newborns’ first vomit (Opening Plenary — Part 1, unidentified observer).

John Beard (observer from Port Arthur, Texas) warned that “a treaty that does not cap plastic production... is a treaty destined to fail” and urged rejection of waste-to-energy and the so-called chemical recycling (Opening Plenary — Part 1, observer).

On paper, work in contact groups contributed to [CRP.1 \(9 Aug\)](#), a heavily bracketed draft consolidating all major negotiating streams. It outlined a contested objective and placeholder scope; multiple options for principles (ranging from precaution and polluter pays to common but differentiated responsibilities and just transitions); criteria and annexes for phasing out or regulating problematic products; product-design rules to enhance durability, recyclability, and chemical safety; potential global targets on polymer production; measures on waste, unintentional releases, and legacy pollution; frameworks for EPR and waste traceability; and proposals for a financial mechanism, capacity building, and technology transfer, along with initial sketches of compliance, monitoring/reporting, and periodic effectiveness reviews. Simultaneously, CRP.1 also documented several broad bracketed options.

If [CRP.1 \(9 Aug\)](#) had become the final framework, it would have established: (i) global bans through an annex-based listing system with time-limited exemptions; (ii) a global upstream target to reduce or manage primary plastic polymer production and use, linked to national reporting; (iii) specific product-design standards (durability, reuse, recycled content), removal of “chemicals of concern,” and comprehensive chemical traceability; (iv) a standing body for implementation and compliance; and (v) harmonized MRV, public disclosure, and national action plans. Although all of this remained bracketed proposal text rather than finalized language, its inclusion showed that some delegations were willing to consider impactful measures that threaten sovereignty and are overly strict.

August 9, 2025 Plenary — Part 2

During Session 2, delegates heavily emphasized health-risk framing. For example, Panama warned that plastics are “in our blood, in our lungs, and in the first cry of a newborn child.” This reasoning explains Panama’s strong support for upstream measures, urging production controls, chemicals-of-concern restrictions, and product-design rules, saying, “We cannot recycle our way out of this crisis... A treaty without production measures will be built on sand.” Indonesia expressed procedural support for the Chair’s approach (consensus, inclusivity) but did not take a position on data or models. Supporters of the treaty continued to cite the evidence-light [Pew/SYSTEMIQ \(2020\)](#) and [OECD’s “Global Plastics Outlook/2060”](#) scenarios.

August 13, 2025 Plenary — Part 3

As the deadline approached, negotiators temporarily set aside the major disagreements and focused on advancing smaller administrative items—such as who will keep the official copy (Depositary), how countries will sign the treaty, and which languages will be recognized as the official text. Contact Group 4 reported that it had forwarded Article 31 (Authentic Texts), Article 32 (Withdrawal), and Article 30 (Depositary) to the Legal Drafting Group (LDG) for further refinement. The Chair then sent Article 30 to the LDG and asked delegates to note the LDG’s work on Articles 31 and 32, with the usual reminder that “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed” and that the treaty’s title and article numbers might still change. As the conference was nearing its end, the Chair initiated bilateral outreach—asking Chile to assist with Finance (Art. 11) and Japan on Supply/Production (Art. 6)—to try to resolve those issues. ENB reported that the LDG completed its review of Depositary and Authentic Texts, and that the Committee agreed to send Withdrawal to the LDG ([ENB daily report, August 13, 2025](#)). The LDG identified only minor editorial adjustments to Depositary and Authentic Texts and also reviewed the signature block during an August 11th meeting; its updates were posted to the [in-session documents index](#).

The day’s most important development was the Chair’s circulation of a 12-page [“landing-zone” draft](#) as a way to break the deadlock. The proposal maintained a framework structure—articles on “problematic” plastic products (Art. 4), product design (Art. 5), releases/leakages (Art. 6), waste management (Art. 7), legacy pollution (Art. 8), just transition (Art. 9), finance (including the use of the GEF and a new dedicated fund) (Art. 10), capacity-building/tech transfer (Art. 11), a non-punitive compliance committee (Art. 12), national plans (Art. 13), reporting (Art. 14), and effectiveness evaluation (Art. 15). However, it left out two contentious points—Scope and Sustainable Production. Regarding product measures, the draft mostly used “should” language and left specifics to the COP (e.g., Parties “should take measures” and the COP would consider proposals), instead of establishing strict bans or targets. Furthermore, the Chair’s draft entirely removed the production-target article, eliminated the annex-listing/exemptions framework, and omitted the chemicals traceability requirement—replacing these with broad COP-guided guidance and national discretion. It also removed several politically significant references (e.g., elements concerning Indigenous Peoples) that many had tried to keep.

Reactions in the plenary were immediate and polarized. Chile, Panama, the EU, Kenya, Canada, Norway, the Federated States of Micronesia, France, the UK, Ghana, Peru, and PSIDS (among others) said the draft was unacceptable or “too weak,” highlighting the removal of plastics-production provisions, the lack of binding obligations, and the loss of key references (e.g., to Indigenous Peoples). Bangladesh stated that the text had been reduced to a waste-management framework (excluding supply, emissions, production, and chemicals of concern). Switzerland pushed back on the text’s reliance on “should” instead of “shall.” Conversely, India and China supported moving forward with the Chair’s revisions, while the Like-Minded Countries group (e.g., Kuwait, with India, Iran, UAE, Bahrain) emphasized CBDR and voluntary approaches and raised trade concerns—positions that are more comfortable with a less prescriptive upstream chapter.

August 14, 2025 Plenary — Parts 4 & 5

With the Chair still pushing to make August 14th a deliverable, most of the day was dedicated to closed-door informals and bilaterals to seek compromises on production controls and chemicals/products provisions ([ENB highlights for August 14, 2025](#)). On the record, only the “tail” articles advanced: Earlier, the Committee had noted the Legal Drafting Group’s clean output on Depositary (Art. 31) and Authentic Texts (Art. 32) and agreed to transmit Withdrawal (Art. 30) to the LDG ([ENB daily, August 13, 2025](#)). Late that night, the Chair issued a [revised draft text](#) timestamped 00:48 on August 15, 2025—a slim framework that kept upstream measures light and left specifics to future COP decisions. By close, there was no consensus on core provisions; the meeting adjourned without agreement, with UNEP confirming the stalemate and next steps to be determined ([press release, August 15, 2025](#); [session hub](#)).

Conclusion

Final-day dynamics reinforced the idea that leakage results from poorly managed waste in specific areas, driven by human behaviors rather than global production totals. Negotiators could only move forward on administrative articles, while upstream caps and chemicals or product mandates remained divisive—evidence that capacity for implementation and enforcement gaps are the main constraints. ([World Bank, *What a Waste 2.0*](#))

The arguments for strong upstream controls still rely on scenario models ([UNEP \(2023\)](#); [Pew/SYSTEMIQ \(2020\)](#); [OECD 2022](#)) that acknowledge assumption-sensitivity and data gaps. The Chair’s pared-down draft implicitly recognizes these uncertainties by postponing details to later COP processes and national discretion.

The challenge the UN encountered in Geneva illustrates that a centralized, one-size-fits-all UN treaty is not the right approach—expensive, intrusive, and poorly aligned with the diverse realities of waste management worldwide. Its failure is actually a positive step. The best path forward is to promote practical, market-driven solutions, not through broad global mandates but through accountable, local, and competitive efforts that deliver measurable environmental benefits at the lowest possible cost.

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