TO: UNEP INC-4
FROM: Sarah Martik, Executive Director

RE: Production Reduction, Human Health, and a Just Transition
Submitted electronically

Honorable Chair and Esteemed Delegates,

I am grateful for the opportunity to submit this intervention on behalf of over 5,000 members and supporters throughout southwestern Pennsylvania in the United States.

Since INC-3, more research has been published to document the widespread and ecologically devastating impacts of the plastic and petrochemical industries. Research out of Pennsylvania State University¹ demonstrates that legacy dumping of radioactive oil and gas wastewater contaminates our water resources today, with clear markers of bioaccumulation in mussels. Radium-226 and 228 are actively finding their way into our groundwater, soil, and surface waters² through processes connected to the extraction and production phases of plastic. Because of its similarity to calcium³, these isotopes enter the body and impact our bones. They are known to cause cancer⁴. We cannot continue to separate plastic “waste” from “pollution.” They are inherently connected because all phases of the plastic lifecycle have their own waste component, which compounds its impact on human health.

The recently released report from Lawrence Berkeley National Labs leaves no ambiguity as to the dire climate consequences of allowing plastic production rates to grow at their current rates: by 2050, GHG emissions from plastic production would be the equivalent to emissions

from 1.1 billion gas-powered cars. Very clearly, plastic is not a climate solution. We must set substantial production limits if we are to meet a 1.5°C warming scenario. A production reduction target of 40% that aligns with the Paris Agreement is the minimum target we can afford with our remaining carbon budget. Even more critically, we must set substantial production limits if we are to protect the frontline and fenceline communities who are, right now, struggling to survive beneath intergenerational adverse health outcomes and environmental degradation from the extraction and petrochemical manufacturing of plastic products. The implementation of this reduction cannot be drawn out or wait for baselines to be established years from now.

In order to protect communities, now and for generations to come, we need an international legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution across the entire lifecycle, beginning with extraction and the production of plastic feedstocks and precursors. This must mean more than global obligations to craft national action plans, which serve as a loophole for producing companies to shirk their obligation to address this crisis. This Treaty must be comprehensive and ambitious in spirit: anything less will fail our people and planet.

In order to ensure that communities can thrive into the future, we need firm commitments to a Just Transition framework. Workers - from petrochemical workers to waste pickers - are more than just workers: they are members of their communities, and their labor contributes to the social and economic wellbeing of their families, friends, and neighbors. Any framework that includes investments toward a Just Transition must recognize that local solutions are the only solutions that will be effective in the long-term. What might work well in my community may not be the right solution for others whose histories and cultural practices are different from mine; however, community-driven solutions are deserving of our shared investment. Globally, fossil fuels are subsidized at an astronomical rate of around $7 trillion⁵. By shifting these subsidies away from fossil fuels toward sustainable solutions, we free up the opportunity to invest in non-toxic reuse and refill systems, worker co-ops, and other community-specific initiatives.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

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⁵ IMF Data on global fossil fuel subsidies. [https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/climate-change/energy-subsidies#:~:text=Globally%2C%20fossil%20fuel%20subsidies%20were%20support%20from%20surging%20energy%20prices](https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/climate-change/energy-subsidies#:~:text=Globally%2C%20fossil%20fuel%20subsidies%20were%20support%20from%20surging%20energy%20prices)