BIR position on the way forward for the Intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) to develop a legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment

BIR, the Bureau of International Recycling, is the world federation which has been supporting the interests of the recycling industry on an international scale since 1948. As the largest international recycling federation, we represent over 30,000 companies across 70 countries, through 37 national associations and over 1000 direct corporate members.

Our mission is to promote materials recycling, free and fair trade of recyclables in a sustainable and competitive world economy, the environmentally sound management of resources, and the use of recycled materials worldwide.

BIR welcomes the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA 5/14) resolution and the Revised zero draft text of the international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment based on a comprehensive approach that addresses the full life cycle of plastic.

In view of the discussions on the scope and objectives of the new treaty, including elements on waste management through resource efficiency and circular economy approaches, BIR would like to outline its key messages below to support the INC delegates.

I. Need the right policy framework for a resource efficient and global circular economy:

- A variety of policies will be needed to support recycled plastic markets, which include legally binding measures, while also ensuring a competitive landscape for plastic recyclers.

- These measures should include:
  - requirements for sustainable product design and their increased capacity to be repurposed and recycled
  - restrictions of harmful polymers and chemicals of concern
  - promotion of safe, environmentally sound, and sustainable non-plastic substitutes
  - globally harmonised standards for recycled plastics, while also exercising caution regarding chemical recycling. In this context, we have recently published a position paper “BIR Position Paper on Chemical Recycling”.
  - reasonable trading rules in recyclable plastic products
  - special focus on short-lived and single-use plastic products and intentionally added microplastics throughout their entire life-cycle

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clear minimum targets for safe and environmentally sound post-consumer recycled plastic content

- The Instrument also needs robust funding mechanisms and economic incentives for the various stages following the end-of-life of plastic products.

II. Need for coherence with existing UN Conventions:

- It would be essential that this new Treaty would not overlap nor duplicate with the existing Conventions like the Basel or Stockholm Conventions.

III. To increase recycling rates, the new Global Plastics Treaty should:

- Recognize the waste hierarchy, which prioritizes recycling over energy recovery or final disposal.

- Enable investments in national waste management infrastructure at municipal level, and in the private sector, to process and recycle plastic waste in an environmentally sound manner.

- Ensure that EPR schemes are carefully designed to preserve market competition. This is further explained in “BIR Position Paper on EPR”.

- However, not all countries (such as small states) currently have the capacity to recycle plastics, nor have sufficient material to attract investment to do so. Therefore, regional solutions and reasonable rules governing transboundary movement will be necessary to ensure and optimize the environmentally sound management of plastic waste.

- We would hope to see recycling optimised in a balanced way, taking into account social, environmental and economic aspects. However, it is essential to note that recycling alone cannot solve the plastic pollution problem in its entirety.

IV. Lastly, we would like to remind that everything begins with changing behavior:

- with 8 billion people living on this planet, every person is responsible for their choices, to avoid waste, to choose reuse, to separate their waste and educate future generations.

- Separate collection is the cornerstone of improving waste management and recycling of legacy plastics in an environmentally sound manner.

To conclude, we hope that the negotiations would continue in an inclusive way throughout the entire INC process and remain transparent.

On the way forward, BIR stands ready to support and contribute to the INC process in its best ability, sharing its expertise in the recycling field.