Honorable Chair, Esteemed Delegates

My name is John Beard Jr. and I am speaking on behalf of the United States Environmental Justice Delegation. My home town of Port Arthur, Texas, is a “cancer cluster” thanks to the petrochemical industry. Port Arthur is on the frontlines of toxic plastic production because of a history of discrimination against communities of color and low-income communities. This human rights injustice stretches all the way back to the dawn of European colonialism and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

It is imperative that this text takes a “full life-cycle approach” to ending plastic production that begins with the extraction of fossil fuels. Omitting this language would undermine the ability of this instrument to harmonize with other multilateral environmental agreements, especially the target set by the Paris Climate Accords to limit global heating from greenhouse gas emissions to 1.5 degrees celcius.

As a former employee of the petrochemical industry for over 38 years, let me tell you that plastics are fossil fuels, all primary plastic polymers are hazardous to human health, and their current production levels are absolutely unsustainable for my community.

If plastic is the gun, primary plastic polymers are the bullets.

Nothing underscores this point more than the members of my community who have been sickened and died from the impacts of petrochemical production. Member states must pursue global reduction targets that significantly phase down and phase out the production of primary plastic polymers by 2040.

Failing to reduce production of plastic polymers and to strictly implement a waste hierarchy will be a failure to protect the health and human rights of not just my community, but all communities. For these reasons it is essential that we achieve a mandate for intersessional work on primary plastic polymers.
We must also establish a transparency framework for primary plastic polymers and chemicals of concern. Hiding this data under the guise of confidential business information is a violation of our human rights: We have a right to know! Mandatory disclosure is the only way to close data gaps, assess progress, and inform the priorities set by the governing body.

My Indigenous brothers and sisters are all too familiar with broken treaties, and Black communities are no stranger to promises by the government and industry that are broken with impunity, and no accountability.

A treaty that does not center environmental justice and human rights is a treaty destined to fail.

My community is on the frontlines of environmental injustice and toxic pollution but let me be clear: plastic poisons people, no matter how far from the front you may live, and no one in this room is immune.

I thank the chair for this opportunity, and in closing allow me to say in my best Texan grammar,”…. “Y’all need to get serious about production reduction and agree to a mandate for intersessional work on primary plastic polymers.

Port Arthur is counting on you, and the world demands you heed our voices; End Plastic and polymer production NOW!

Thank you.