

Written Statement for the UN Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-5.2)

Korean Youth Calling for the Adoption of a Just and Inclusive International Plastics Treaty

Good Neighbors International ‘Youth NGO Activists’

I. Foreword

We are Korean ‘Youth NGO Activists’ from Good Neighbors International and university students from Yonsei Leaders Club(YLC). Deeply concerned about the climate crisis aggravated by plastic pollution and its impact on youth rights, we have engaged in a range of advocacy campaigns to raise public awareness against excessive consumption of plastic and the adverse effect of plastic waste. Acknowledging that only a global and domestic legal framework addressing the issue of plastic pollution can efficiently address the issue, we have engaged our advocacy efforts toward UN environmental efforts for a normative solution. It is our belief and conviction that in order to develop a relevant normative solution youth need to be engaged to provide a transformative approach for a responsible and climate friendly plastic production, consumption and recycling.

Ahead of the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-5.1), held in Busan, South Korea, in November 2024, we have engaged in public campaigns and submitted a written statement calling for the inclusion of youth participation rights and climate justice in the treaty text. However, INC-5.1 concluded without reaching agreement on core issues such as limiting plastic production, regulating toxic chemicals, and establishing financial mechanisms—leaving us disappointed and concerned.

The upcoming INC-5.2 session in Geneva, Switzerland, this August represents the final chance for the global community to adopt a legally binding treaty that meaningfully addresses the plastic pollution crisis. As global citizens and members of the generation that will inherit the consequences of today's decisions, we call on governments to take decisive action. We urge the Global Plastics Treaty to fully uphold the four core rights of children under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)—the rights to Survival, Protection, Development, and Participation—and to fulfill its responsibility to secure a sustainable future for all.

II. Our Calls to Action

1. Youth participation and education must be institutionally guaranteed to address the climate and plastic crises.

Climate change and plastic pollution directly threaten young people's present and future. Youth are among the most affected—and the most motivated to act—yet are often excluded from decision-making processes. Despite widespread youth-led advocacy for a global plastics

treaty, young people still lack formal speaking rights in official negotiations. They also lack access to comprehensive education that equips them with the knowledge and skills needed to tackle plastic pollution.

This situation violates Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC, which affirm every child's right to an education that fosters personal potential and responsible citizenship. Article 12 of the UNCRC further asserts children's right to express their views in all matters affecting them and to have those views given due weight. General Comment No. 26 (2023) by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child emphasizes that children must be included in all areas of environmental policymaking.

We therefore demand that the Global Plastics Treaty formally recognize youth as key stakeholders and establish mechanisms to include youth delegations in the negotiation process. In addition, we urge member states to strengthen Article 7 of the INC-5.1 Zero Draft (Access to Information and Participation of Civil Society) to mandate environmental education that empowers youth—not just with knowledge, but with the skills to lead. Youth must be supported with the tools, resources, and platforms needed to become active changemakers in this crisis.

2. A just transition must be ensured, as the impacts of plastic pollution are unequal.

The harms caused by plastic waste are not distributed equally. Youth in developing countries are disproportionately affected, facing the harshest consequences of both climate change and plastic pollution.

Much of the plastic waste generated by developed countries is exported to developing nations, where it is often processed in hazardous conditions. For example, in Panipat, India, discarded clothing is illegally incinerated or chemically treated, exposing communities—including children—to severe health risks and exploitative labor. This violates the UNCRC's commitment to equal rights for all children, and highlights the urgent need to address environmental injustice in the global waste trade.

We call on the international community to uphold the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) by providing financial and technological support to youth in developing countries. The Global Plastics Treaty must acknowledge and address these inequities and ensure a just transition that enables all youth to participate in shaping a safer, healthier future.

3. Youth must be protected from hazardous chemicals in plastics.

More than 16,000 chemicals are used in plastic production, yet fewer than 1% are regulated across their life cycles. Toxic substances such as PFAS, phthalates, and bisphenols are known to disrupt hormones, damage the nervous system, and impair reproductive health—posing serious risks to youth development and immunity. Despite this, they remain common in everyday items like school supplies, food packaging, clothing, and toys.

At INC-5.1, disagreement between civil society and industry over whether to broadly restrict hazardous additives or regulate them selectively led to a lack of consensus. We strongly urge

that the treaty include a “negative list” of banned chemicals and introduce robust safeguards to eliminate youth exposure to toxic substances.

Article 24 of the UNCRC requires governments to protect children’s health from environmental hazards. Enforcing such protection is both a legal obligation and a moral imperative.

4. Plastics must be regulated across their full life cycle to protect youth development.

Plastic pollution occurs at every stage of the plastic life cycle—from resource extraction and manufacturing, to use and disposal. This life cycle releases greenhouse gases, toxic additives, and microplastics that harm ecosystems and human health. These impacts reach into homes, schools, and communities, undermining the right of youth to grow up in a safe and healthy environment.

Yet at INC-5.1, some countries resisted upstream regulation, focusing only on waste management. Such an approach ignores the harms caused during production and consumption, allowing continued threats to youth safety and development.

We urge INC-5.2 to adopt a full life cycle approach to plastic regulation. Only by addressing the impacts of plastic at every stage can we uphold the rights of youth to survival, development, and protection from environmental harm.

5. Plastic production must be drastically reduced to safeguard youth survival.

Plastic production has surged from 2 million tons in 1950 to 400 million tons in 2022, and is projected to reach 800 million tons annually by 2050. Only 9.5% of plastic produced in 2022 came from recycled materials. Despite exponential growth in production, progress on reducing fossil fuel reliance and improving recycling systems remains minimal.

Without a dramatic reduction in production, plastic waste and greenhouse gas emissions will continue to rise—further accelerating climate change and endangering human health. Reducing plastic production is essential to securing youth survival and wellbeing.

At INC-5.1, negotiations stalled due to divisions between countries calling for production limits and those with economic interests in fossil fuels. **We therefore call for the treaty to include legally binding targets for reducing plastic production. Our right to survival must not be subject to market interests. The time for action is now.**

III. Conclusion

The climate crisis aggravated by plastic pollution is not just a threat to our future and a threat to our present. As youth who will inherit the consequences and as active contributors to solutions, we call on the international community to fulfill its responsibility by adopting a strong, binding Global Plastics Treaty.

We urge all parties to commit to clear reduction targets and concrete implementation measures. Let us build a future that is sustainable, equitable, and safe for generations to come.

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