NOTE VERBALE

The Apostolic Nunciature in Canada presents its compliments to the Secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme and has the honour to present the “Contributions of the Holy See to the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiation Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including the marine environment (INC-4)” (Enclosure).

This document contains the observations of the Holy See on the revised draft text (UNEP/PP/INC.4/3).

The Apostolic Nunciature in Canada avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme the assurances of its highest Consideration.

Ottawa, 23 April 2024

To the Secretariat of the
United Nations Environment Programme

(with Enclosure)
Contribution of the Holy See
to the
fourth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee
to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution,
including the marine environment (INC-4)
(Ottawa, 23-29 April 2024)

Observations on the revised draft text (UNEP/PP/INC.4/3)

The Holy See expresses gratitude to the Chair of INC-3 for their efforts and welcomes the purpose of the fourth session to advance the negotiations so that the INC can finalize, as soon as possible, an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, as provided for in the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) resolution 5/14 (2022).

The Holy See continues to follow the negotiations and wishes to contribute to the process by submitting some recommendations on the revised draft text resulting from the INC-3 (UNEP/PP/INC.4/3).

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Global plastic production has increased significantly since the 1950s, currently standing at 430 million metric tons per year. Over two-thirds of this production consists of short-lived products, with a growing amount becoming waste after a single use. If current trends continue, plastic production is expected to triple by 2060. The production and pollution of plastic are major contributors to the interconnected crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Notably among others:

- under a “business as usual scenario”, GHG emissions from plastics will make the 1.5°C unattainable;

- exposure to plastics can harm human health by potentially affecting fertility, hormones, metabolism, and neurological activity;

- plastic pollution affects over 800 marine and coastal species, while more than 11 million tonnes of plastic waste flow annually into oceans.

Plastic pollution is a significant global environmental issue that has adverse effects on the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The impact of plastic pollution on the marine environment is of particular concern, and without meaningful action, it is expected to almost triple by 2040.

This means that “our industrial system, at the end of its cycle of production and consumption, has not developed the capacity to absorb and reuse waste and by-products,” in particular because it has not yet adopted a circular model of production, which is “capable of preserving resources for present and

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1 Cf. UNEP, Turning off the Tap. How the world can end plastic pollution and create a circular economy, 2023, xiv.
2 Ibid., xv.
4 Cf. UNEP, From Pollution to Solution: A global assessment of marine litter and plastic pollution, 2021, 12.
future generations, while limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderating their consumption, maximizing their efficient use, reusing and recycling them”. 5

Therefore, it is crucial that the instrument aims to put an end to plastic pollution by addressing the entire life cycle of plastics, including extraction, production, import/export, use, reuse, recycling and disposal. Studies suggest that accelerating the market for reusable products would lead to a 30% reduction in plastic pollution by 2040, and that recycling could reduce the amount of plastic pollution by a further 20%. 6

Achieving this objective will require “a change of course, a decisive shift in the current model of consumption and production, all too often entrenched in the “throwaway” culture that is indifferent to both the environment and people”, 7 particularly the poorest.

Amidst this market transformation towards circularity in plastics, the Holy See recommends that action be taken based on three key pillars:

1) along with the responsibility of producers, there is “a great need for a sense of social responsibility on the part of the consumers”, 8 which leads us to reflect on our lifestyles, including our consumption choices. It is important to note that “juridical measures by themselves are not sufficient. They must be accompanied by a growing sense of responsibility as well as an effective change of mentality and lifestyle”; 9

2) to shift away from a throwaway culture and towards a culture of care, we must undertake an educational journey, at a both personal and communal levels. 10 Therefore, “if laws are to bring about significant, long-lasting effects, the majority of the members of society must be adequately motivated to accept them, and personally transformed to respond”, 11 and we need “educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care”; 12

3) the current interdependence requires “a global consensus […] in confronting the deeper problems, which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries”. 13 Therefore, international cooperation, including with international organisations and other bodies, should be based on a global ethic of solidarity in the service of a future shaped by shared responsibility in the whole human family. 14 This is important since “the poorest areas and countries are less capable of adopting new models for reducing environmental impact because they lack the wherewithal to develop the necessary processes and to cover their costs”. 15 In this regard, the rights of indigenous peoples must be properly protected.

Cooperation among countries is becoming increasingly important, whether bilaterally or multilaterally, and through international agreements, to protect the marine environment. It is

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5 Pope Francis, Laudato si’, 22.
6 Cf. UNEP, Turning off the Tap. How the world can end plastic pollution and create a circular economy, 2023, xiv.
7 Pope Francis, Address to the Participants in the Green and Blue Festival, on the occasion of the 2023 World Environment Day, 2023.
8 Pope Francis, Laudato si’, 206.
9 Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 468.
10 Cf. Pope Francis, Address to the Participants in the Green and Blue Festival, 2023.
11 Pope Francis, Laudato si’, 211.
12 Ibid., 210.
13 Ibid., 164.
14 Cf. Pope Francis, Fratelli tutti, 127.
15 Pope Francis, Laudato si’, 52.
crucial to protect the resources of the marine environment and pass them on to future generations. Civil society can also be a significant actor in this process.

On this basis, the Holy See recommends that efforts to end plastic pollution should be guided by the following principles:

- **Common but differentiated responsibilities** should be employed also to change patterns of production and consumption as well as lifestyle;

- **Global solidarity**, as the responsibility the present generations have towards those of the future, which also concerns individual States and the international community.\(^\text{16}\) "Such responsibility must be illuminated and guided by continual reference to the universal common good".\(^\text{17}\)

- **Subsidiarity and good governance**: we should act at all levels, from local to international, in a both coordinated and responsible manner;

- **Sustainable and integral human development**: “authentic development presumes […] full respect for the human person, but it must also be concerned for the world around us and take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system".\(^\text{18}\) The degradation of nature is thus closely linked to the culture that influences human coexistence,\(^\text{19}\) "since all beings are interdependent in the universal order established by the Creator";\(^\text{20}\)

- **Intergenerational equity and social justice**, with specific care for the poorest, people in fragile situations and indigenous peoples;

- **Just transition**: a shift to circular economy should create opportunities for jobs, income, as well as innovation, including in developing countries;

- **Precautionary approach**: prudent policies should be based on comparing risks and benefits, and linked to the need to acquire more thorough knowledge and transparency;\(^\text{21}\)

- **Participation**, as well as access to information, education and knowledge.

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\(^{16}\) Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 467.

\(^{17}\) Ibidem, 470.

\(^{18}\) Pope Francis, Laudato si’, 22.

\(^{19}\) Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in veritate, 51.

\(^{20}\) Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 466.

\(^{21}\) Cf. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 469.