

The resumed session of the fifth meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment (INC-5.2)

Statement for Opening Plenary from Action on Smoking and Health

5th August 2025

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Laurent Huber, the CEO of Action on Smoking and Health, a member of the global Stop Tobacco Pollution Alliance, a coalition of tobacco control and environmental organizations created to participate in these negotiations.

I want to make three specific points that I believe are important for a successful conclusion to our work.

The first is to echo what has been said by many delegations and members of civil society: not all plastics are the same. They vary in several dimensions. Some are more problematic than others; some are more toxic than others; some are less necessary than others; and some are single-use. Some plastics should be regulated, and some should be banned immediately.

A singular example of the latter is cigarette “filters.” I emphasize that the word filter does not have the same meaning as other filters as it implies that they remove some of the harmful chemicals from cigarettes. To be clear, they do not, and were never intended to. AS WHO has stated, cigarette do not protect health, and the release of tiny plastic particles during the act of smoking causes additional harm. They make cigarettes more deadly, not less. Cigarette filters are wholly unnecessary.

Once cigarettes are smoked, the filters become cigarette butts, which are full of toxins and carcinogens as well as plastic. A small cigarette butt may seem like a little thing, but one butt dropped into a goldfish bowl will kill the goldfish. Filters are extremely toxic.

Cigarette filters are the most littered item on earth. Approximately 4.5 trillion filters – yes, trillion - are discarded into the environment each year. As you walk down the street tonight look down. You will see them everywhere. Cigarette filters are a major source of microplastics. Any list of plastics to be banned must include cigarette filters.

As such, cigarette filters must be included in Annex Y along with the list of products to phase out by a specific date.

My second point is this: just as not all plastics are the same, not all stakeholders are the same. I urge delegations to account for inherent conflicts of interest as they finalize this treaty. To return to tobacco as an example, the tobacco industry is excluded from

participating in the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control because of the inherent conflict between their interests and the interests of public health. Not all conflicts of interest are as stark, but I urge you to consider those conflicts. The emphasis on inclusivity is laudable, but the problem we address is too severe to worry about ensuring continuing corporate profits. The overall good of society should be our overriding goal.

Finally, I want to stress the importance of connecting the plastics treaty to other international instruments and norms, in particular health and human rights. It is imperative to recognize the broader impact plastics has on people beyond litter. In the end, environmentalism is about human health – we evolved on this planet, and the more our actions change the planet the further we get from a healthy environment. Both health and a healthy environment are recognized human rights. The treaty text should explicitly recognize human rights and health treaties, not least the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which itself links to human rights and includes Article 18 on protecting the environment.

Thank you.

Action on Smoking and Health