Honorable Chair, Esteemed Delegates

My name is John Beard Jr. and I am speaking on behalf of the United States Environmental Justice Delegation. My community in Port Arthur, Texas, is on the frontlines of toxic plastic production because of a history of discrimination against communities of color and low-income communities that stretches all the way back to the dawn of European settler colonialism and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

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

As an employee of the petrochemical industry for over 30 years, I can 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 and yours.

If plastic is the gun, then 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. I strongly encourage member states to pursue global reduction targets that significantly reduce production of primary plastic polymers by 2040. Failing to reduce production of plastic polymers and to strictly implement the waste hierarchy will be a failure to protect the health and human rights of not just my community, but all communities.

I also urge member states to support a transparency framework for primary plastic polymers and chemicals of concern. Hiding this data behind the walls of confidential business information is a violation of our human rights and mandatory disclosure is the only way we can possibly close data gaps, assess progress, and inform the priorities set by the governing body.
It is imperative this instrument contains a “start and strengthen approach” that allows the eventual Conference of the Parties to strengthen control measures over time. This will also strengthen the harmonization of the instrument with other MEAs, particularly the Stockholm Convention and Montreal Protocol.

My Indigenous allies are all too familiar with broken treaties, and Black communities are no stranger to promises by the government and industry being broken with no accountability. A treaty that does not center environmental justice and human rights is a treaty destined to fail.

My community may be 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 to share my reflections.