Basel Action Network Intervention

Distinguished Delegates, it is vital that we not repeat the mistakes of a half century of waste management by chasing waste downstream while blindly ignoring its upstream sources. We can never manage a waste problem by frantically and hopelessly attempting to mop it up while failing first to turn off the increasing volumes pouring out of the plastic tap upstream. That is to say, we must ensure that the new Treaty is NOT a Plastic Waste Management Treaty but is a Plastics Prevention Treaty. The Basel Convention already exists to focus on the downstream management of plastic waste and its trade and we should not waste our time duplicating the mandate and competency of this important instrument. I think it has become quite clear that plastic as it exists today, is not inherently circular and no amount of repeating of that word will make it so. As such, we are never going to be able to recycle our way out of the plastic crisis at a scale that will be meaningful. Our role then this week must be to uniquely look upstream to reduce and prevent plastic production at source starting by phasing out the production of toxic, single-use, wasteful, problematic, plastic products.

But far too much remains hidden from our collective knowledge to inform this process. It is therefore necessary to require binding transparency on all producers as to what chemicals are in the chemical soup we have simply referred to as plastic. The public has the right to know what chemical additives are routinely found in the plastics they use each day and the impacts of these on their children, their selves and the greater environment. The public also has the right to know which plastics are likely to release micro-plastic or harmful breakdown products into the environment.

With help from a panel of independent scientists operating as a subsidiary body to the treaty, the evidence of toxicity and harm from plastic products and their additives can finally be fully understood and a hierarchy of harm can be established which will set priorities for a plastic products phase-out schedule with three key aims: 1) to eliminate the most toxic chemical additives, 2) to end production of harmful polymers, 3) and to ban inappropriate and wasteful uses of plastics. Criteria to develop the phase-out schedule must be established by the Parties and adherence to the global phase-out schedule must be binding on all Parties. If we do nothing else other than these vital achievements, we will have set the course for a successful treaty which can be built upon for years to come.

I thank you.

-- Jim Puckett, Executive Director, BAN