Agenda Item 4

India Institute for Critical Action Centre in Movement (CACIM), India

Thank you Mr Chairman. My name is Swathi Seshadri and I work in India with communities impacted by the petrochemical plants that are producing polymers and by waste to energy facilities that are burning plastics at the expense of their livelihoods and health.

The International Energy Agency’s report titled ‘Future of Petrochemicals’ suggests that “petrochemicals are set to account for over a third of the growth in oil demand to 2030, and nearly half to 2050, ahead of trucks, aviation and shipping”. According to the same report, production of these feedstocks will increase in West Asia with the bulk of the production taking place in the Asia Pacific region. While the Asia Pacific region does have some of the larger markets due to their large populations, it is also true that the per capita consumption of petrochemicals is larger in Europe and North America. We expect that the Asia Pacific region will welcome this industry in the name of development and end up holding and dealing with toxicity on behalf of the developed world. It is important to note that already, financial flows between 2010-2020 for petrochemical projects in the Asia Pacific region (excluding West Asia) have been to the tune of US$ 95.9 bn, which is higher than to any other region.

Therefore, while some countries in the developed world are gearing up to reduce their emissions, petrochemical producing countries are augmenting their production capacities with greenfield projects and expansion of capacities despite communities clearly communicating their objection to these projects. It is critical for petrochemical producing nations to consider that globally, the petrochemical industry accounts for 18% of all industrial-sector CO2 emissions, or 5% of total combustion-related CO2 emissions. Also, governments have no choice but to recognise that if we are to stay within the 1.5 degree limit, then we need to reduce plastic production and stop petrochemical expansion.

These countries also need to consider the immense impact on the health of workers and local communities and on the livelihoods of fishers and farmers. If countries here are committed to reducing plastic pollution by addressing its entire lifespan, what could the justification of increased capacity for polymer production be?! The world’s leadership needs to consider the concern of people and the planet while making decisions, rather than conflating private profit and big infrastructure with the development of your people. What we therefore need is a strong plastics treaty which will address the source of the problem with robust mandatory upstream measures and not merely end of pipeline false solutions including waste incineration.