

Position Paper

Submitted by
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Committee: United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA)
Agenda: Drastically Reducing Maritime Pollution, including Plastic
Country: South Africa

As United Nations Environment Programme celebrates 50 years of its establishment, it's high time that all the nations of the world come together to fight the menace of maritime pollution. The Republic of South Africa is in support of addressing the issue of drastically reducing maritime pollution including plastic.

Oceans account for 70 percent of the surface of our planet and play a pivotal role in the health of our planet and those who inhabit it. Plastics are the largest, most harmful and most persistent fraction of marine litter, accounting for at least 85 per cent of total marine waste. Of the 300 million tonnes of plastic waste produced worldwide every year, 14 million tonnes end up in the oceans. Most of this ocean plastic has its origins on land and is washed into the sea. Plastic pollution leakage into aquatic ecosystems has grown sharply in recent years and is projected to more than double by 2030, with dire consequences for human health, the global economy, biodiversity and the climate.

Almost 80,000 tonnes of plastic leak into the oceans and rivers of South Africa each year, making up 3% of the plastic waste generated in the country every year. About 2,371 thousand tonnes of plastic waste is generated in South Africa per annum. From that, 70% is collected, but just 14% of it is recycled. If we want to address the issue, then we need to ensure that we focus on prevention rather than cure. We have joined Clean Seas Campaign of The United Nations Environment Programme with the goal of galvanizing a global movement to turn the tide on plastic by reducing the use of unnecessary, avoidable and problematic plastics including single-use plastics and phasing out intentionally added microplastics. We are one of the Contracting Parties to the London Convention and the London Protocol.

We have started a new project under the South African Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries. Through increased litter collection and community-led waste sorting and recycling, the project will reduce litter generation at its source, thereby lessening the amount of pollution that reaches the ocean. The project is designed to help South Africa achieve its targets under Sustainable Development Goal 14.1, under which the country committed to preventing and reducing marine pollution by 2025, as well as Sustainable Development Goal 6.3 to improve water quality by 2030 through reducing pollution.

We underscore the need to adopt a circular economy approach that considers the full life cycle of materials to address the crisis of waste and pollution. We are in support of mandating the UNEP to establish an intergovernmental negotiating committee to negotiate an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution in addressing the global environmental challenges. There is a need for multilateral collective response and to adhere to the Rio Principles. We also need to emphasize on the mandates of the respective Rio Conventions.