**Forum:** Environmental Committee

**Issue:** Discouraging the production and use of single-use plastics.

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**Introduction**

We are living in a globalized world, and plastics take a big role in people's consumption. Within all plastic production and consumption we find around the world, we specifically are challenged by single-use plastics, which due to their lack of repurposing must be thrown away.

Every year, our oceans gather millions of tonnes of plastic waste, causing the death of marine creatures such as sea turtles or whales, which the global society has raised concerns about. Single-use plastics are not only causing problems to oceans and marine animals, but also to the environment as a whole, as plastics take at least a hundred years to decompose which can have detrimental consequences on it.

Regarding the production of single-use plastic, M. Garside states that, “In 2018, the global production of plastics reached 359 million metric tons, with 62 million metric tons produced in Europe alone.” (Garside, M., 2018)

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Plastic**

According to the United Nations Environment programme (UNEP, 2018) plastic is a “lightweight, hygienic and resistant material which can be moulded in a variety of ways and utilized in a wide range of applications”.

**Microplastics**

According to the United Nations Environment programme, 2018 (UNEP, 2018), “plastics who do not biodegrade, but instead photodegrade, meaning that they slowly break down into small fragments known as microplastics”.

**Single-use plastic**

Also referred to as **disposable plastics**, they are commonly used for plastic packaging and include items intended to be used only once before they are thrown away or recycled. These include, among other items, grocery bags, food packaging, bottles, straws, containers, cups and cutlery. (United Nations Environment programme, 2018).

**Pollution**

“Pollution is the introduction of harmful materials, known as pollutants, into the environment”. (National Geographic, 2012)

**Eco-friendly**

Eco-friendly means not harmful to the environment, earth-friendly.

**Marine litter**

It consists of items that have been made or used by people and deliberately discarded into the sea or rivers or on beaches; brought indirectly to the sea with rivers, sewage, storm water or winds; or accidentally lost, including material lost at sea in bad weather. It causes a wide spectrum of environmental, economic, safety, health and cultural impacts, and its degradation is very slow. (UNEP, n.d.)

**Plastic pollution**

Plastic pollution is the accumulation of [plastic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plastic) objects and particles (e.g. [plastic bottles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plastic_bottle), [bags](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plastic_shopping_bag) and [microbeads](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microbead)) in the Earth's [environment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environment_(biophysical)) that adversely affects [wildlife](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wildlife), [wildlife habitat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wildlife_habitat), and [humans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pollution#Human_health)**.**

**Issue Overview**

**Historical Background**

Plastics are taken from natural and organic materials, such as cellulose, coal and crude oil, being the latter its most prominent raw material. In order to make crude oil, many compounds and processes are required. This production begins with the separation of the heavy crude oil into different fractions (groups of lighter components) by distillation. Each fraction differs in size and structure, but they are all a mixture of hydrocarbon chains.

Plastics have distinct risks to human health in its different stages of life cycle, as the Plastic Pollution Coalition reported:

* “Extraction and transportation of fossil feedstocks for plastic, which releases a number of toxic substances into the air and water, including those with known health impacts like cancer, neurotoxicity, amongst others;
* Refining and production of plastic resins and additives, which releases carcinogens and other highly toxic substances into the atmosphere, with effects such as impairment of the nervous system, reproductive and developmental problems, cancer, leukemia, and genetic impacts like low birth weight;
* Consumer products and packaging, which can lead to ingestion and/or inhalation of microplastic particles and hundreds of toxic substances;
* Plastic waste management, especially “waste-to-energy” and other forms of incineration, releases toxic substances including heavy metals such as lead and mercury, acid gases and particulate matter, which can be absorbed into air, water, and soil causing both direct and indirect health risks for workers and nearby communities;
* Fragmenting and microplastics, which enter the human body directly and lead to an array of health impacts (including inflammation, genotoxicity, oxidative stress, apoptosis, and necrosis) that are linked to negative health outcomes ranging from cardiovascular disease to cancer and autoimmune conditions;
* Cascading exposure as plastic degrades, which further leach toxic chemicals concentrated in plastic into the environment and human bodies;
* Ongoing environmental exposures as plastic contaminates and accumulates in food chains through agricultural soils, terrestrial and aquatic food chains, and the water supply, creating new opportunities for human exposure.” (Plastic Pollution Coalition, 2019)

**Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

* **Republic of Kenya:** According to Imogen Calderwood, Kenya has implemented “the world’s harshest plastic bag ban, and it is prompting some seriously creative solutions”. If anyone in Kenya is found using, producing, or selling a plastic bag they face up to four years in jail, or a $38,000 fine (Calderwood I., 2018).
* **The United Kingdom, Republic of France, Kingdom of Morocco, Republic of Rwanda:** They have banned the use of single-use plastics, but have not taken any other drastic measures.
* **The United States of America**: As one of the biggest consumers of single-use plastics the US does not have any substantial regulations regarding the issue. Some state governments have taken matters into their own hands and have issued several laws and decrees limiting their consumption.

**Latest Events**

The UN Environmental Programme, alongside the World Resources Institute, published on January 1st 2021 a “Legislative Guide for the Regulation of Single-use Plastics” as a way to inform and encourage nations to take action in this issue.

**Possible Solutions**

* Government action involving:
  + Imposing of fees to the single-use plastic holders.
  + Reducing the single-use plastic production in factories.
  + Imposing of taxes on plastic items
  + Promoting, by education and awareness, the message that plastic pollution is harming society
  + Start implementing eco-friendly, or compostable, single use plastics

**Useful reference material**

**RELEVANT UN TREATIES AND EVENTS**

* Draft resolution on Marine Litter and Microplastics, 5 December 2017 (UNEP/EA.3/L.20)
* Draft resolution on Innovative Pathways to Achieve Sustainable Consumption and Production, 28 March 2019 (UNEP/EA.4/RES.1)
* Draft resolution on Marine Litter and Microplastics, 28 March 2019 (UNEP/EA.4/RES.6)
* Draft resolution on Environmentally Sound Management of Waste, 28 March 2019 (UNEP/EA.4/RES.7)
* Draft resolution on Environmentally Sound Management of Waste, 28 March 2019 (UNEP/EA.4/RES.8)
* Draft resolution on Addressing Single-use Plastic Products Pollution, 28 March 2019 (UNEP/EA.4/RES.9)
* Draft resolution on Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, 28 March 2019 (UNEP/EA.4/RES.11)
* <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=8079&context=etd>
* <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/34570/PlastPoll.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>

**LINKS TO NGOs**

* “[SUPER](http://www.super.ngo/)”
* “[Plastic Pollution Coalition](https://www.plasticpollutioncoalition.org/)”

**ARTICLES**

* [“Europe must resist attempts to weaken single-use plastics laws”](https://www.euractiv.com/section/circular-economy/opinion/europe-must-resist-attempts-to-weaken-single-use-plastics-laws/)
* “[Dad to push regulation of single-use plastics in Davao City](https://www.mindanews.com/top-stories/2020/03/dad-to-push-regulation-of-single-use-plastics-in-davao-city/)”
* [“Toward zero waste”](https://www.bangkokpost.com/life/social-and-lifestyle/1859289/toward-zero-waste)

**PAST RESOLUTIONS**

* [Resolution Egypt.docx](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1puDhMPNMvXF6kePC-TkEVIedhi6jGM0Y/view?usp=sharing) (Thimun Singapore)
* [Resolution Ukraine.docx](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1irkSrvDnXlW1GAfcUXgtouzAHf-nfhD7/view?usp=sharing) (Thimun Singapore)

**SPEECHES OF POLITICAL LEADERS**

* [“Independence Day speech: PM Modi calls for putting end to single-use plastic”](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/independence-day-speech-pm-modi-calls-for-putting-end-to-single-use-plastic/videoshow/70686857.cms)

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United Nations (n.d.). *UNEP - UN Environment Programme*. Retrieved from <https://www.unenvironment.org/>