



2022 United Nations Ocean Conference Side Event

Depolluting oceans through controlling trade in plastic wastes and combatting illegal traffic under the Basel Convention

Tuesday, 28 June 2022, 16:00-17:15, Altice Arena, Room 2

Organized by: Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Background on the event (one paragraph)

Marine plastic pollution is an environmental problem occurring on a global scale today. Global plastic production has reached 320 million tonnes a year. Only 9% has been recycled and another 12% incinerated of the estimated 6.3 billion tonnes of plastic waste produced since the 1950s. 95% of disposable plastic packaging is wasted and marine debris remain intact in the ocean for long period of time. With the Plastic Waste Amendments, adopted by the COP in 2019, the Basel Convention is at the forefront in promoting the prevention, environmentally sound management and control of transboundary movements of plastic waste, thus protecting human health and the environment, including our oceans. This side-event presented the trade regime applicable to plastic waste and highlighted the relevant obligations of the Basel Convention and Plastic Waste Amendments. It also explored recent trade trends and showcased how Parties control international trade and prevent and combat illegal traffic in plastic wastes on the ground thus preventing waste not managed in the environmentally sound manner from leaking into seas and oceans. Enforcement challenges and solutions and strategies to address environmental crimes at the national and global levels were emphasized, including the practical importance of partnerships and inter-agency collaboration. The side-event also explored how work undertaken under the Basel Convention can contribute to and facilitate both the negotiation and the implementation of a future international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution.

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

- The exponential growth of trade in plastic wastes, which are in some cases hazardous and in others unsuitable for recycling has become a major concern. Plastic Waste Amendments to the Basel Convention is a welcome global policy development serving to better control

flows of plastic wastes between countries and prevent countries from receiving unwanted waste which they don't have capacity to manage in the environmentally sound manner.

- The Government of Kenya, co-hosting the UN Ocean Conference and being the Party to the Basel Convention called upon other countries to ensure the implementation of the obligations to the Convention, including abiding to a set of rules on transboundary movements and preventing and combatting illegal traffic in order to protect our oceans from marine pollution. The lessons learned from the implementation of the Basel Convention need to be taken into account when developing a new treaty on plastic pollution.
- Parties to the Basel Conventions in the global South take actions searching for concrete solutions. At the national level countries used the opportunity to regulate their imports and exports beyond obligations of the Basel Convention. As reported by UNCTAD, 83% of all trade-related notified measures to WTO are related to plastics originating from developing countries, including Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). It appears that only half of plastic-related measures are notified to WTO demonstrating countries' concerns over their capacities to safely manage plastic wastes and their intention to control trade.
- Not only countries that have access to oceans are concerned. Land-locked countries face challenges linked to polluted rivers and lakes that threatens their ecosystems and jeopardizes their livelihoods. As such, Zimbabwe is a landlocked country with no territory connections to either an ocean or endorheic basins, however inland fishing activities play a critical role in providing livelihoods for both local communities and private sector players. Discarded waste of plastic fishing nets constitutes a significant part of river plastic litter. However, there are encouraging initiatives to tackle the issue. For example, in the framework of a pilot project in Kariba a ton of abandoned plastic fish nets has been recovered, weighed and compensation paid to community members and the waste stored at a storage facility to be further transported to Harare for recycling. Such initiatives serve to draw lessons learned for improving implementation elsewhere and finding pathways through which it can be replicated.
- Countries in the global North have also demonstrated a great concern over the pollution of oceans. The Government of Norway was at the frontline to have made a proposal to amend the Basel Convention with regard to plastic wastes in order to improve transparency, traceability and monitoring of export and import of plastic wastes and apply the trade control measures for hazardous and mixed types of plastic wastes which was consequently adopted in 2019. The Government supports numerous capacity building efforts through the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and other avenues in order to assist countries to enhance environmental protection of oceans and seas and combat marine pollution.

- There are exciting initiatives on the national and regional level for SIDS aiming to reduce marine pollution. One example is the SPREP's 4-year Moana Taka Partnership with Swire Shipping which provides opportunity for Pacific States to export hazardous and other wastes free of charge for environmentally sound management and disposal at designated facilities in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Rim countries. This arrangement will now be replicated for SIDS from other regions through the GEF ISLANDS Project Waste Free Shipping Partnership that will provide free shipping of recyclables saving limited landfill space and creating new opportunities for island-based waste management companies
- Enforcement of the Basel Convention obligations and national legislation clearly need to be strengthened throughout the world. This can be done using a range of traditional and innovated measures. An example of the latter is an innovative approach of using GPS trackers on waste to track illegal shipments of plastic waste in real time as it is being done in Sweden. Such initiatives are low cost, low effort and high reward and replicable at local and international levels.
- UNODC has over the past years increased its efforts related to addressing illegal trade in plastic and hazardous waste by supporting frontline level customs officers handling such waste through its Container Control Programme and other related programmes. Globally, most countries tend to emphasize controls of import because of revenue collection but UNODC highlighted that increased checks of export could help ease the burden for countries which receive illegal waste. UNODC also mentioned that updated risk indicators and improved communication between countries are important tools to address this, as well as other forms, of crime.
- Given that plastics bring about four layers of concern regarding plastics: their impact on ecosystem, microplastics in the food chain, synthetic fibers in nets and the impact of plastic pollution on blue ocean economy as gesticulated by UNCTAD, attention is also to be given to upstream actions, in particular encouraging the use of environmentally save substitutes and alternatives to plastics to prevent the generation of plastic wastes from the start. This is something that the new treaty on plastics could reflect upon.

Key recommendations for action (5 - 6 bullet points)

- Accelerate efforts by Parties to implement obligations of the Basel Convention in relation to plastic wastes, including on combatting and preventing illegal traffic.
- Strengthen cooperation between the environment and trade sectors towards better policy coherence and efficiency and supporting countries in informed policymaking regarding their trade policy for plastics which have far reaching implications on the domestic waste management capacities and industry but also on protection of human health and the environment.
- Capitalize on existing enforcement actions by increasing support and training for customs and law enforcement entities, promoting national level cooperation among environmental

authorities, trade ministries, fisheries, customs, law enforcement as well as civil society organizations, the private sectors and academia.

- Promote innovative solutions supporting the sound management of plastic wastes and combatting illegal traffic by sharing best practices and replicating successful initiatives across countries and regions.
- Promote partnerships at the global, regional and national levels as effective mechanisms for moving forward the environmentally sound management of plastic wastes and combatting illegal traffic thus helping our oceans and aquatic ecosystems to stay clean and healthy.
- Contribute the wealth of knowledge and experience on how to address marine pollution through the implementation of the Basel Convention for the development of a new treaty on plastics.
- Consider the life cycle and circular approach which entails promoting collection and recycling of plastic wastes as well as encouraging the use of environmentally save substitutes and alternatives to plastics to prevent the generation of plastic wastes through national and regional policy of plastics.

Voluntary Commitments (one paragraph)

The Basel Convention is the most comprehensive global treaty dealing with hazardous wastes and other wastes throughout their lifecycles, from generation and transboundary movement to disposal. It is currently the only legally binding global instrument that specifically addresses plastic waste since the adoption of the amendments to annexes II, VIII and IX of the Basel Convention at the fourteenth meeting of the Conferences of the Parties in 2019. Noting that the prevention, minimization and environmentally sound management of plastic waste as well as the effective control of its transboundary movement will reduce the amount of plastic waste entering the environment, including oceans, the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention committed itself to working to support such efforts. Furthermore, at their 2021/2022 meetings, the conferences of the Parties to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions welcomed the technical assistance plan for the implementation of the conventions for the period 2022–2025, which encompassed provision of support for developing countries and countries with economies in transition for the implementation of the conventions to address plastic pollution including in the marine environment; and invited the Basel and Stockholm Conventions Regional Centres to continue their activities relevant to address plastic waste. As highlighted in the current side event, the Secretariat is committed to facilitate cooperation and coordination among existing organizations and mechanisms towards addressing plastic pollution, such as through the “Environmental Network for Optimizing Regulatory Compliance on Illegal Traffic (ENFORCE)”, the platform to bring together existing resources and enhancing and improving cooperation and coordination between Parties, Basel Convention Regional Centers, UNODC, the World Customs Organization, INTERPOL, EUROPOL, UNEP, and others to deliver capacity-building activities and tools on preventing and combating illegal traffic.

UNODC, through the UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme, remains committed to working with UN Member States to address the illegal trade in plastic and hazardous waste. Through technical assistance for customs and law enforcement officers working in ports, the Office addresses smuggling through cargo containers, a demonstrated mode of transport for this type of illegal goods. In addition to inter-agency and international cooperation, the technical assistance focuses on trade routes, risk indicators and communication tools.