

Distinguished Delegates.

I speak on behalf of the International Pollutants Elimination Network, representing over 600 NGOs in 127 countries, working for a toxics-free future for all. We wish to convey our sincerest wishes for a productive meeting toward fulfilling the SDG 14 commitments.

To reach the targets, we must tackle toxic chemicals in the oceans. The escalating production of chemicals, coupled with limited international controls has led to a global, invisible crisis where the oceans are exposed to a cocktail of toxic chemicals. It will not be possible to restore ecosystems, fish stock or to conserve coastal and marine regions if we do not have global controls on toxic chemicals.

These chemicals have dire effects for coastal communities. In Alaska, contamination of traditional foods is a public health issue and cultural crisis. Moreover, coastal communities often bear the cost of toxic spills, which became evident after the fire onboard X-Press Pearl ship outside Sri Lanka last year. IPEN found that the debris on the beaches contained alarming concentrations of toxic chemicals and the local fishermen told of lost income and changes in the sea.

Toxic chemicals are especially affecting SIDS. A few years ago, IPEN measured the mercury levels in over 700 women from 21 countries, mostly SIDS. Shockingly, 75% of the women had higher levels of mercury than the health advisory levels, which is a direct consequence of their dependence on seafood.

We arrived in Lisbon following the Stockholm Convention and Plastics Treaty meetings. These initiatives provide promise for global controls on toxic chemical production, but the oceans remain global dumping grounds for the chemical and fossil fuel industries.

Unfortunately, discussions on pollutants often centre around the visible pollutants but let us not forget the things that we cannot see today that damage our future tomorrow.

Thank you.