

United Nations Environment Programme – Ad Hoc Open Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics

Plenary Session: Item 5 (National, Regional, and International Response Options)

NGO Intervention: The Center for Oceanic Awareness, Research, and Education

Date: Tuesday, 29 May 2018 (afternoon)

Thank you, and good afternoon co-chairs, excellencies, distinguished delegates and colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

I represent **COARE**, The Center for Oceanic Awareness, Research, and Education

I also speak today on behalf of the joint position of six major groups: Women, NGOs, Children & Youth, Farmers, Indigenous Peoples, and Science & Technology.

In the opening session, UNEP Executive Director Erik Solheim spoke of action, and he celebrated, for example, Kenya's strong stance on bags as well as the European Union's recent move to limit single-use plastic products.

Indeed, action is absolutely necessary to address the ubiquitous and pervasive problem of marine litter and microplastics. The fact that we are all gathered here in this room right now is a clear indication that the status quo is *not* a realistic option.

Instead, our groups call for the development and adoption of a new global architecture which includes new legally binding commitments.

Clearly, plastic pollution is an issue of global concern, and *thus* requires *global* solutions. This can **not** be addressed at the national or regional levels alone.

As a local example, I was involved in the passage of the first state-wide ban of single-use plastic bags in California. It all began in 2007, when the city of San Francisco banned thin film single-use bags.

Over the next decade, more than 125 municipalities throughout the State enacted similar and progressive legislation. Despite the fact that nearly all coastal cities took action, plastic bags from unaffected inland communities would still find their way to our streams, rivers, shorelines, and ocean.

It wasn't until we passed the State-wide ban that we finally were able to put a collective halt to the estimated 123,000 tons of single-use bags discarded in California.

By no means am I suggesting that the local regulations were unimportant; they each contributed to a significant reduction in plastic consumption. However, without broader policy, we were merely chipping at the iceberg, and pollution from neighboring communities continued to negatively impact even those who took definitive action.

The same can now also be said of California as a State, and despite its efficacy, Californians are still impacted by neighboring States.

We can easily extrapolate that to the global community, where even countries who have taken definitive action are still not immune to plastic pollution.

Indeed, a global framework will guide, inspire, and encourage effective national and regional action, keeping in mind that option 3 on the creation of a new global architecture also includes option 2 on increasing the impacts of existing global instruments., recognizing that existing global instruments are not enough and that a new framework still requires some overarching global governance mechanism.

Along those lines, examples from stated national and regional policy options still largely focus on waste *management*, and our groups would like to remind this body that the plastic pollution issue cannot be characterized as a mere waste *management* issue. It is, more accurately and more simply, an issue of WASTE and the projected increase in plastic production. We need to determine holistic and comprehensive approaches – including limitations on production, recommendations for design, and extended producer responsibility – to avoid creating this waste in the first place.

Thank you all for your time, attention, and consideration.