

**Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics**  
**Position Paper-UNIDO, Department of Environment**

**Background**

1. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) is mandated by its Member States to promote Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development (ISID). Three pillars of ISID work together to accelerate the creation of prosperity, advance economic competitiveness, while safeguarding the environment.
2. Reduction and, eventual elimination, of marine litter and microplastics is considered by UNIDO as part of its efforts related to:
  - a. prevention and reduction of land-based waste through resource efficiency and circular approaches and business practices;
  - b. extraction of resources from and safe disposal of land-based waste that could not be prevented; and
  - c. conservation and sustainable use of ecosystem services.
3. UNIDO's currently on-going technical cooperation activities consist of encouraging and supporting the implementation of resource efficient cleaner production (RECP) in a large number of industrial sectors in collaboration with 65 Centers<sup>1</sup> in 51 countries spanning all continents. These Centers have assisted and continue to assist thousands of industrial establishments to reduce energy, materials and water use in economically viable ways. Resource and energy efficiency through dematerialization, detoxification and modularization of products, product components, packaging and production processes; industrial waste and waste water management; and productivity enhancements throughout supply chains are some of the elements of RECP programmes and work towards prevention and reduction of land based plastic waste. Technical assistance in identification and seizing of opportunities for reuse of waste and by-products between industrial firms and promotion of Eco-Industrial Parks that reach targets beyond compliance with environmental and social regulations work towards the same objective for prevention/reduction of land based plastic waste. An example of safe disposal of waste containing hazardous substances such as plastic waste of electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) is underway in 13 Latin American countries and a similar initiative is being developed for 15 SADC countries. Technology transfer and adaptation of hazardous plastic waste is also supported in a number of country programs.

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<sup>1</sup> Resource Efficient Cleaner Production Centers were established as a joint initiative of UNIDO and UNEP since 1994. They are all operationally and financially independent from both Organizations.

4. UNIDO is a member of the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP) and collaborates with FAO, UN Environment, UNESCO and other relevant UN Agencies and Programmes, NGOs and academic institutions in addressing these priority areas and welcomes the convening of the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics.

#### **Major barriers and options for combatting marine litter and microplastics from land-based sources**

5. Some of the major barriers to marine litter and microplastics from land-based sources are:
  - a. **Regulatory deficiencies and lack of administrative capacity in implementation:** lack of commonly understood and agreed definitions and related standards for waste and secondary materials; labelling requirements for hazardous additives in plastics such as flame retardants; bans for unnecessary products such as microplastics in cosmetics where alternatives exist; limited extended producer responsibility for most types of plastic packaging and products; conflicting regulatory priorities and issuances, complemented with deficiencies in administrative capacities in implementation
  - b. **Lack of and/or confusing market signals:** that recognize plastic waste as a valuable resource that could be reused through deposit schemes, charges and taxes on consumption
  - c. **Low levels of investment in waste management:** infrastructure in waste collection, sorting/processing, recycling/upcycling, and disposal infrastructures, including waste water
  - d. **Insufficient research:** on designs that will detoxify, modularize, and extend life span of plastic products and facilitate their reuse, repair, remanufacturing, and recycling/upcycling; on the environmental health risks posed by marine litter and plastics on humans, animals and plants; on costs risks and solutions
  - e. **Low levels of consumer awareness:** on waste separation and disposal, sustainable purchasing and consumption habits
6. Potential responses should aim to overcome the above barriers through partnerships between governments, industry, academia and societal actors.