



Concordia University

at the United Nations Environment Program

Fourth Session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine

environment INC-4

April 22-29, 2024. Ottawa, Canada



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Key definitions and acronyms

GRULAC: [Group of Latin America and the Caribbean](#)

INC: Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee

PSIDS: Pacific Small Island Developing States

UNEA: United Nations Environment Assembly

UNEA5.2: Resumed Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly

UNEP: United Nations Environment Programme

EPR: Extended Producer Responsibility

The Context

Plastic pollution is one of the most pressing environmental challenges of our generation. With plastic production doubling every 11 years, and global plastic production reaching approximately 368 million metric tons in 2019, according to the Plastics Europe Market Research Group, only 9% has been estimated to have been recycled, according to the Global Plastic Waste Management Outlook. The scale of the problem is escalating rapidly as plastic waste enters our oceans, rivers, and ecosystems at an alarming rate, these plastics lead to leakage and contamination of our soil, and food chains which has resulted in the findings of micro and nanoplastics in the human endocrine system, placenta, and even bloodstream.

Undoubtedly, plastics are posing serious threats to marine life, biodiversity, and human health, requiring urgent action at all levels to address this global crisis and transition towards a circular economy for plastics. Witnessing these negotiations emphasized the significant role of investing in alternative solutions to plastics such as reuse systems, and biomaterials as well as investing in plastic recycling infrastructure, research incentives for academics, and ensuring a just transition by financial compensation, and including in these discussions the work of informal waste pickers, and everyone involved in the recycling process. Cross-functional collaboration has proven needed to ensure plastics are removed from the environment, and properly recycled as well as disseminating information on the impacts of plastic pollution in human health to influence public policy that will enforce industry practices aiming to tackle plastic pollution.

Please note that given the complexity of the topics, our report excludes in its scope topics of great importance that we recommend that the reader continue their research on the chemicals of concern, and financial mechanisms including EPR, plastic credit, plastic bond, and waste export practices.

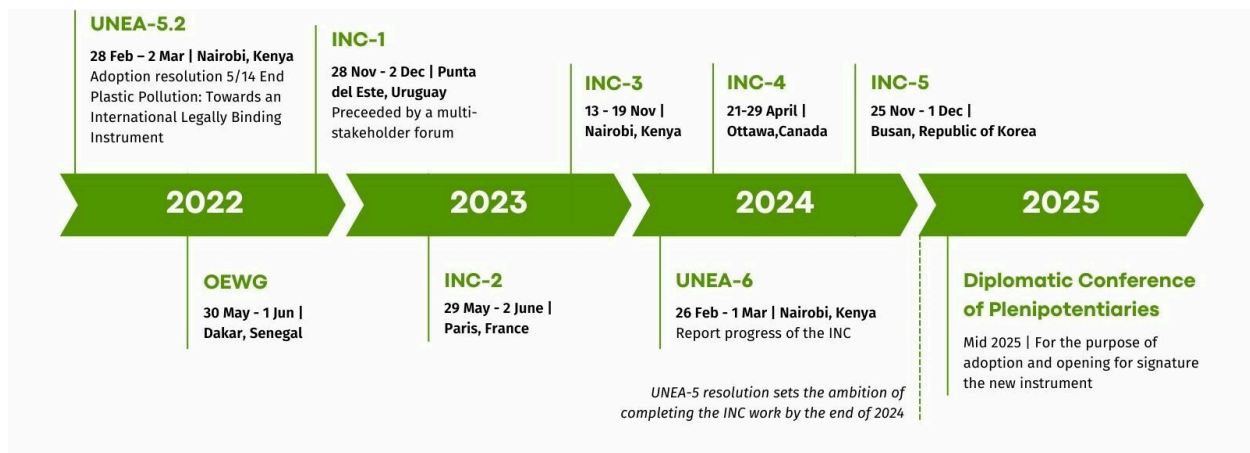
We thank the support of Concordia University for helping send our delegation of plastic recyclers, community organizers, and researchers, without you this would not have been possible. The Concordia Precious Plastic Project (CP3) has been established over the last 4

years to raise awareness on the plastic crisis, and to provide both Concordia students, and community members with a space where they could bring their waste, and learn how to create new items using 100% plastic waste as a raw material. Over these last years, CP3 has diverted close to 500 kg of plastic waste, created 22 new product types, supported 10 academic projects, hired 7 interns using SHIFT’s support, and received one international award. The project has exceeded the capacity of their current space, and, affected by the lack of prospect and budget cuts, will be moving outside of the university under the name of Recycla, where they will be able to increase the recycling rates and continue to serve the community, and Concordia students.

The path towards INC-4

In March 2022, at the fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), 175 nations agreed to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. An intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) was convened to lead the negotiations following the agreement.

The negotiations were divided into 5 sessions to be followed by a diplomatic conference for the official adoption of the treaty. INC-1 was held in November 2022 in Punta del Este, Uruguay. INC-2 in May 2023 in Paris, France. INC-3 in November 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya. Finally, INC-4 in April 2024 in Ottawa, Canada. INC-5 is scheduled for November 2024 in Busan, South Korea.



The first three INCs were marked by a focus on procedural matters and a slow progress, as countries could not agree on the organization of the work, nor the topics to be included. For INC-3, the secretariat had prepared what was called a Zero Draft Text which comprised the initial considerations and proposals by the member states delegations. However, during the third session complaints were made that the text did not reflect on the previous negotiations and that

there was a lack of consensus on the elements present on the proposed Zero Draft Text. INC-3 ended with no authorization for intersessional work.

In December 2023, the secretariat published a Revised Zero Draft Text, which was the basis of the negotiations for INC-4. The goals for INC-4 proposed by the negotiating committee included advancing and streamlining the revised text of the instrument as well as deciding on any intersessional work required between the fourth and fifth sessions. It is important and interesting to highlight that the rules of procedure for negotiations had not yet been adopted, and applied to the work on a provisional basis. Meaning, countries had not fully agreed on the procedural measures and in order not to delay any longer moving forward with the negotiations, these rules can still be altered, which could lead to impact on the whole treaty in itself.

Stakeholders

1. Country Delegations

- [The High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution](#)

The High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution is an informal group of more than 60 countries representing every United Nations region, with the goal to end plastic pollution by 2040 and develop an ambitious and effective global agreement. The High Ambition Coalition is Co-Chaired by Norway and Rwanda as announced during UNEA5.2. Some of its members include Canada, Germany, France, Republic of Korea, Chile, Costa Rica, Ghana, Australia, Jordan, Romania, European Union and many more. Interestingly, the United States of America, a top plastic waste producer, is not a member.

- **Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC)**

GRULAC represents over 20 countries from south and central America. In the scope of the negotiations for a Global Plastic Treaty, they reinforced the need for legally binding, instead of voluntary, actions and country-driven measures. The group also emphasized the importance of access to financial resources, knowledge and technology transfer as well as capacity building.

- **Asia & the Pacific**

Composed of over 60 countries, most tend to support the most ambitious options within the treaty provisions. Provisions where there is greater divergence among the group include the ones on the limitation of the production and supply of new plastic, the reduction or even phasing

out of certain harmful chemicals and plastics, the introduction of EPR schemes. While Pacific Island States are seen to defend a strong and ambitious treaty, countries like China, India, Iran, Russia and Saudi Arabia have rejected outright certain treaty obligations, stating they are against any international action on the issues mentioned above.

- **The African Group**

One of the five United Nations regional groups, the African Group is composed of over 50 countries. Some of their focus topics include the just transition, emphasizing the need for the treaty to take into account the national circumstances with special consideration for communities in vulnerable situations such as the waste pickers. They also demonstrated support for upstream measures focusing on prevention, measures to tackle illegal traffic and dumping of plastic waste as well as the development of a multilateral fund to provide financial resources to developing countries to meet their commitments and obligations.

- **Like-minded group**

Emerging after INC-3, the self-called "Like-minded group" consists mainly of countries heavily dependent on the fossil-fuel industry, such as Russia, China and Saudi Arabia. They have been viewed as a group who is trying to delay the progress of negotiations as well as reduce the ambition of the treaty.

2. Industry Lobbyists

The presence of lobbyists from the fossil fuel and chemical industry was at a record for this INC, with 196 lobbyists. This outnumbered the 180 representatives from the EU and 73 registered from the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS). This presence exerts significant influence on public policy regarding plastic pollution, often advocating for measures that prioritize their interests over environmental concerns. These lobbyists represent industries deeply entrenched in the production and distribution of plastic products, which are largely derived from petrochemicals.

Petrochemical lobbyists often leverage their expertise and resources to shape public discourse around plastic pollution. They have been known to fund research or sponsor studies that downplay the environmental impact of plastics or highlight the economic benefits of plastic production and consumption, as well as having historically threatened scientists when plastic pollution was being unfolded in the 70s (verify date). We have personally attended an event

hosted at the Westin Hotel by NAPCOR where a woman dressed in a lab coat would share the history of PET plastics, without ever mentioning it was a fossil fuel material, then prompt us to conduct experiments that she would normally perform with girl scouts, and in schools. The event shared little information on the harms of plastics, sharing numbers that could not be traced back to open reports or research, and asking attendees to do an experiment involving passing a moisturized stick through a rubber balloon, and putting plastic shreds in water to see the buoyancy.

Additionally, petrochemical lobbyists frequently engage in direct lobbying activities, such as meeting with legislators, drafting legislation, and testifying at hearings. Through these efforts, they can directly influence the language and content of proposed laws and regulations related to plastic pollution. This is outside of the scope of what we could have seen at the UNEP INC-4 attending as observers, what we did witness was the presence of advertising through banners, cars, trucks that would criticize a global plastic treaty or appeal to the argument that plastics save lives, even though healthcare and research are not included in this negotiation, in order to pressure decision-makers to voting against a global plastic treaty.

3. Scientific Community

The scientific community had their largest-ever representation at this meeting and widely advertised themselves as readily available resources for any delegations that required scientific information for any matters. They hosted several side events to share their knowledge not only to inform the decisions being made at the treaty but also suggestions on mechanisms and procedures for how to track global progress after the treaty has been ratified. The scientists in attendance were mostly members of the Scientists' Coalition for an Effective Plastics Treaty. Briefly, the coalition's official stance is that the treaty needs to be informed by and in alignment with the most current, robust, independent scientific research that is peer-reviewed and free from conflicts of interest. They have also been firm in stating that at its current state, the scientific literature has enough information for us to act on and base our decision-making process from.

4. Universities

The Universities did not have great representation during the INC4 as it can be a very long and tedious process to become UNEP accredited for universities. However, they had a crucial role in bringing a perspective of research and scientific facts for the INC-4. Here is a breakdown of university representation.

5 from Europe, 2 from Canada (Concordia and Waterloo), 1 from Australia, and 5 from The United States for a total of 13 Universities.

Some universities were able to organize side events where they presented their focus of studies related to plastics. For example, Plymouth University organized a panel on Alternatives & Substitutes to Plastic Products.

5. NGOs

Many NGOs were present as Observers at the UNEP. Some also formed delegations in order to voice their collective concerns during the negotiations. A few notable delegations of NGO's included [Break Free from Plastic](#), a global movement that brings together more than 13,000 individuals in 3000 different organizations around the world, working together to achieve a future free from plastic pollution. Other notable NGO's such as Ellen McArthur Foundation had a very important role in organizing side events that we will talk about later in this report. Furthermore, the CIEL (Center for International Environmental Law) published a very striking [article](#) showing the diversity of groups and delegations present at the INC-4.

6. Indigenous groups

[The Indigenous Peoples Caucus](#) played a significant role during the INC-4. Their 28 representatives came together to advocate for a strong international treaty. The caucus emphasized the need for the treaty to respect human rights, including the right to self-determination, and informed consent for Indigenous communities. They highlighted the disproportionate impact of plastic pollution on their lands and waters, calling for a holistic approach that includes Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in the treaty's framework. Although their voices were drowned by lobbyists, their presence underscored the critical importance of incorporating diverse voices and experiences in global environmental policymaking.

The indigenous groups carry a deep-rooted respect for the environment, seeking not to separate the wellness of nature from the wellness of humans. They shared the struggles of living in areas where their food, customs, and health is being largely impacted by the plastic crisis. The Alaska Community Action on Toxics was present at this event, sharing the latest research collaborative done between academics and local communities on [The Arctic's Plastics Crisis | ACAT \(akaction.org\)](#), during the event they also emphasized on the health impacts the chemicals of concern in plastics have been impacting the Arctic population that requires

environmental justice to mitigate the disproportionate burden of plastic pollution.

The Concordia delegation (who we are and our input)

Natasha Liberman Santos

Born and raised in Brazil, Natasha graduated from Concordia University with a Bachelor of Commerce in 2020. In that same year, she founded the environmental literacy and digital project, Mind the Eco, which focuses on building awareness on sustainability challenges, such as the plastic crisis. She has previously worked as the social media coordinator at Zero Waste Concordia, and subsequently as the engagement coordinator for Concordia University Office of Sustainability. A polyglot speaking Portuguese, English, and French, Natasha is expanding Mind the Eco's reach by creating multilingual content and seeking collaborations with NGOs in the sustainability space.

At INC-4, Natasha was able to support the delegation on the creation of educational content for Mind the Eco, CP3, CEED and the Office of Sustainability social platforms. She focused on understanding the negotiations structure, discussions and outcomes as well as on being present at the Contact Group 1 sessions for note taking. Natasha also explored potential collaborations between Canada and Latin America by creating connections with members from the GAIA organization, the International Waste Pickers Association and other South American local initiatives.

Miguel Felismino

Miguel is a Filipino-Canadian plastic pollution researcher based in Montreal. He is a Concordia University alumni and an ambassador for the Concordia Precious Plastics Project. His fight against plastic pollution started when he collaborated with the Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks and published the first report of microplastic pollution in Lake Simcoe, Ontario. He completed his Honours Bachelor of Science at the University of Toronto followed by his Master of Science at Concordia University. During his time at Concordia, he conducted research to provide evidence of the negative impacts of microplastics on fish. It was also during this time that he joined Concordia's vast sustainability network by becoming a Sustainability Ambassador (as part of the Sustainability Ambassadors Program) and partnering with the Concordia Precious Plastics Project to help reduce the plastic footprint from microplastic research. Continuing with his passions, Miguel is now a doctoral candidate at McGill University

and is conducting pioneer work on the impacts of agricultural plastic mulch films on aquatic environments.

At INC-4, Miguel connected with fellow scientists and engaged in discussions about how the academic and scientific community can further aid and inform these negotiations. He engaged heavily with the Scientists' Coalition to gain a better understanding of the role that science can and must have in making an effective plastics treaty. He also sought collaborations with fellow scientists to bring interdisciplinary and international projects to both his McGill and Concordia networks.

Wanda Stamford

Wanda is a Brazilian Concordia alumnus in Business Technology Management. Her distress for the environmental and human impact of the plastic crisis has propelled her desire to act. She co-founded a hyperlocal plastic recycling initiative to support material innovation, and purpose-driven employment opportunities, called the Concordia Precious Plastic Project (CP3) where she continues to help as a mentor, while growing a leather-like biomaterial using kombucha bacteria cellulose at home to explore with the boundaries of plastic alternatives. As CP3 pivots into the social enterprise Recycla, Wanda will be supporting in managing these operations.

Since graduating, Wanda has been working at Couche-Tard at the global level with sustainability projects, this came as a curiosity to learn more about multinational business operations. As a polyglot project manager working at the local and global level, Wanda has also supported ESG disclosures, sustainability reporting, and waste management research through waste audits as well as procedural and data analysis.

At the INC-4, Wanda's objective was to increase the youth representation as observers at this event, bringing as many delegates as possible from our plastic recycling ecosystem to learn about how these negotiations took place. Wanda represented both Concordia University and the Brazilian non-profit, Instituto Global Attitude as an observer.

Felix Beaudry

Félix Beaudry is an artist and designer from Montréal. He holds a BFA in Design and computation arts from Concordia University and a DEC in Industrial Design from CVM. Félix was part of the core team that brought CP3 to Concordia and is now working at Atelier Écodesign in Cégep du Vieux Montréal overseeing an interdisciplinary workspace specialized

among other things in plastic recycling. He founded Trad & Design to explore the link that unit traditions, sustainability, and technology through the creation of objects of spéculative designs.

Samita Mandjee

Samita, born in the Reunion Island and having lived in Madagascar, is passionate about nature conservancy and environmental advocacy. Having studied Human Environment and Sustainability at Concordia, Samita continued her life education with various internships in Uganda and Jamaica. Samita is currently the Executive Director at CEED Concordia, a fee-levy association of Concordia University and a non-profit organization operating in Montreal, Canada and Gulu, Uganda with additional projects throughout Africa and Latin America. We provide youth with experiential learning and development opportunities that make a positive impact on their community and empower them to become lifelong change makers. She is also the founder of Ayata Botanix, a natural and zero waste cosmetics company.

At INC-4, Samita connected with a few delegates and organizations from the Africa Group. Most importantly, she met with the country director of [GAYO Uganda](#) (Betty Osei Bonsu) to establish a clear partnership between CEED in Uganda and GAYO Uganda. With that partnership, we agreed that CEED will become a host organization for GAYO's Youth Climate Council and will work in partnership with Gulu University to establish an Eco-Club that will be spearheaded by CEED. Furthermore, we are looking forward to building this partnership forward through different grant applications and event collaborations. This fruitful partnership shows that organizations that work towards similar goals achieve tenfold what they set out to do when they work together.

Pramila Choudhary

Pramila's journey is a testament to the deep connection between one's upbringing and their professional endeavors. Growing up in the arid landscape of western Rajasthan, India, she imbibed invaluable lessons in sustainability from her everyday experiences on the farm and during her summer vacations in the desert with her grandmother. These formative years instilled in her a profound understanding of agriculture practices, livestock management, hand spinning, and textiles, all of which laid the foundation for her later pursuits in design. Her decision to enroll at the National Institute of Design (NID) in India further fueled her passion for textiles, apparel, and industrial design. However, it was during her time in Europe, particularly in Switzerland, that Pramila came to appreciate the intrinsic value of India's rich handmade practices and cultural

heritage. This realization prompted her to dedicate over a decade to working closely with the handmade industry in various capacities, serving as a design consultant, bridging international markets, collaborating with non-profit organizations, and engaging with governmental bodies to promote and preserve traditional crafts.

Pramila's commitment to sustainability led her to actively engage with initiatives both within and beyond academia. Before embarking on her PhD journey at Concordia University in 2023, she was already deeply involved in interdisciplinary efforts toward sustainability. Her role as a sustainability ambassador and her receipt of the Sustainability Champion's Award in April 2024 underscore her dedication to advancing environmentally conscious practices. Participation in events like the INC-4 (presumably referring to an international conference on sustainability or climate change) during her PhD research journey demonstrates Pramila's commitment to understanding and addressing pressing global issues such as plastic pollution and climate change. Moreover, her involvement in Concordia's Precious Plastic Project (CP3) as a designer-researcher underscores her proactive approach to fostering resilient, climate-positive communities both on campus and beyond. Her efforts exemplify the power of personal experience, education, and professional expertise converging to create a positive impact, not only within academic spheres but also in broader societal contexts. Her journey serves as an inspiration for integrating traditional wisdom with modern solutions to tackle contemporary challenges, particularly those related to sustainability and climate resilience.

The Negotiations

The Structure

INC-4 negotiations were based on the Revised Zero Draft Text which was put together by the chair of the negotiating committee, including provisions and options that took in account proposals from all member states. The text was divided into two Contact Groups (CG), and each CG was divided into sub-groups.

Contact Group 1	Contact group 2
<u>Subgroup 1.1</u> Part I: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 Part II: 12 and 13bis	<u>Subgroup 2.1</u> Part III: 1 and 2
<u>Subgroup 1.2</u> Part II: 1, 2, 3, 3bis, 4, 4bis, 5, 6, 9(b), 10(a), 13	<u>Subgroup 2.2</u> Part IV: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 8bis Part V: 1, 2, 3 Part VI
<u>Subgroup 1.3</u> Part II: 7, 8, 9(a), 10(b), 11	

Representatives from all member states were expected to be present in the group discussions. However, some delegations did not have enough delegates to split between the sessions which oftentimes happened concomitantly. Pakistan, for instance, had only one delegate in place. The organization of work was, thus, a point of constant disagreement throughout the week, which in the beginning delayed substantial negotiations.

Contact Group 1 proved to be more complex when it came to reaching convergence. This is mainly due to the fact that certain topics contained in Part I and II were a source of disagreement. Examples include the objective of the treaty, chemicals of concern, primary plastic polymers and EPR . Some countries would like to see a timeframe in the objective, proposing the year 2040 as their target, while other countries want to opt out.

The majority of the negotiations was characterized by the process of streamlining the text which at the beginning of INC-4 consisted of 70 pages. Towards the end, member states finally began the so-called textual negotiations, meaning discussions on the substance of the text.

What's next for the negotiations?

It is worth mentioning that these negotiations are on the basis of consensus, thus as long as one country opposes a certain part of the text, that part cannot be present in the final version. INC-4 ended with a more concise version of the Zero Draft Text, yet one is still full of brackets (text where consensus was not achieved). "INC Members also agreed on intersessional work –

expert meetings that take place between the official INC sessions – that is expected to catalyze convergence on key issues. In addition, members decided to create an Open-ended Legal Drafting Group to form at INC-5, serving in an advisory capacity by reviewing elements of the draft revised text to ensure legal soundness."

At INC-5, countries are expected to adopt the rules of procedures, currently adopted on a provisional manner only, prepare an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment and adopt the report at the end of the session, so that it can be signed at the diplomatic conference.

INC-4 Side Events

The Events

Besides the main negotiations, businesses, NGOs and governments hosted their own events to push their agendas, generate reflections and discussions or simply provide greater information for attendees. Over 40 side events happened throughout the week, and we were lucky to participate in many of them, learn new ideas and scientific discoveries as well as connect to different individuals who are pushing the fight against plastic pollution within their means.

Highlights

The last frontier: Waste Pickers against environment contamination from plastic waste

Among the many side events we had the opportunity to attend, Wanda and Natasha participated at the "The last frontier: Waste Pickers against environment contamination from plastic waste" event. Organized by the International Waste Pickers Associations in partnership with the Brazilian Government, highlights from their presentation included:

- The international magnitude of the formal and, more often, informal labour involved in collecting plastic waste. Waste pickers from India, Colombia, Brazil, Kenya, and Canada shared their experiences, and although different in some forms, their challenges are commonly similar. Some examples include the unequal distribution of financial return between the waste pickers and the recyclers or waste management businesses, the lack of access to health and safety equipment and the gender disparity within this type of work.
- Formalization of their work is a big topic, and one that the organization Anvina is working towards through a platform for better data management, that would allow waste pickers

to better value their waste collected. However, it is still unsure how this financial distribution can be effectively achieved without the presence of public policy.

This event also touched on the importance of a just transition which in the context of a global plastic treaty refers to ensuring that the transition towards a more sustainable and circular economy for plastics is fair, inclusive, and equitable for all stakeholders, particularly those who may be affected by the changes such as the labor rights of waste pickers.

Strengthening Global Plastic Pollution Mitigation

Hosted by different organizations, including the Environmental Law Institute, "Strengthening Global Plastic Pollution Mitigation: Integrating Implementation and Compliance in the Draft Plastics Treaty" was a truly interesting side event that provided greater insights on the legal aspects of the negotiations, such as:

- The importance of clear provisions on how to track the implementation of the treaty in order to ensure compliance from its signatures.
- The need for a science policy interface to keep adapting the plastic policy as more information is discovered.
- The challenge of who and how should report on compliance requirements, given the different positions and circumstances developing and developed countries are in. Thus, some requirements could be voluntary for certain member states, and mandatory for others.

Kigalima

The Kigalima event was held to showcase the potential synergistic approach of both Rwanda and Peru to host a Diplomatic Conference on Plastic Pollution in Kigali, followed by an Early Action Summit in Lima. The goal of these gatherings would be to both uplift local tourism, and to support intersessional work amongst stakeholders in between the next INC-5. Both countries showcased their commitment to taking action towards a legally binding global plastics treaty, and illustrated why their respective countries were the best places to host intersessional work. You can find their full proposal video [here](#).

Asia in Focus: Multi Stakeholder Knowledge Sharing on Plastic Initiatives

This event was co-organized by the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES), The Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) and the Ministry of Environment of Japan. It was held on Monday, April 22nd, from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. During this event, different stakeholders presented their findings on knowledge sharing, data utilization, technology and EPR as focal points of action. Below are some key points of reflections that emerged during the discussions:

- Considering the whole life-cycle approach (including upstream and downstream) is the most cost effective solution for the highest leakage reduction.
- A report from the OECD Regional Plastics Outlook for ASEAN + 3 countries showed that region-specific modeling could provide a more granular assessment of the plastics production, utilization, and waste generation of each ASEAN member state.
- EPR can be a useful policy to implement to manage the production of plastics, but it has to be well implemented to be useful. It should be mandatory and also include the full life cycle of plastics. It is a cross-cutting issue that should be fair, inclusive and adaptable to each country's specific context.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) & Reuse

At the sixth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6), PR3: The Global Alliance to Advance Reuse, highlighted several key points:

- Reuse has better environmental impacts than recycling.
- Reuse involves creating systems and standards to build confidence for investment in the reuse industry.
- Standards for reuse must be inclusive and ensure interoperability.
- Reuse is not just a waste solution but also a climate solution.

During the event, participants discussed the importance of the "reuse" part of the mantra "reduce, reuse, recycle," emphasizing that it should be prioritized. Speakers noted the need to include packaging reuse options in negotiations for a new legally binding treaty on plastics, recalling that reuse used to be common but has declined due to the rise of single-use plastics. They stressed the urgency of developing standards and harmonizing definitions of reuse and

circularity. This side event was organized by the delegations of Chile and Fiji in collaboration with **PR3: Global Alliance to Advance Reuse.**

During the discussion, participants emphasized that reuse is a **place-based solution tailored to local realities.** Representatives from African and Chinese NGOs called for more effective action in their countries. A private sector representative highlighted the need for supply chains that facilitate reuse and the decarbonization of logistics, noting the importance of these measures for companies committed to net zero targets.



In a subsequent event we met with PR3 reps and they let us know that they are working on a set of 8 Core Normative Standards for reuse systems. They invited us to review their working document “RES-002: Container washing, inspection & packing for distribution” that is now open for public comments. PR3 is developing these norms following the requirements of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). They also created a “reuse rose” logo that can be applied to products that align with their standards.

Demystifying Reuse event organized by University of Portsmouth and Ellen MacArthur Foundation

Negotiators aiming to end global plastic pollution have been urged to prioritize reuse systems by experts from the University of. At a recent event at the Fairmont Chateau Laurier Hotel in Ottawa, attended by NGOs, industry representatives, governments, and the informal waste sector, the focus was on sharing knowledge and building support for reuse systems. Scientists from the Revolution Plastics Institute (RPI) believe this is essential for the success of the Global Plastics Treaty.

At the fourth round of Global Plastics Treaty talks in Canada, RPI researchers emphasized that reuse systems are crucial. They co-hosted an event with the UK and Chilean Governments and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation called “Demystifying Reuse,” which aimed to clarify what reuse should look like under the treaty.

The researchers urged countries at the INC-4 meeting to recognize reuse systems as a key solution to the plastic pollution crisis. While reuse has widespread support, there is concern that confusion about its implementation may hinder progress.

Antaya March, research lead at the University of Portsmouth's Global Plastics Policy Centre, highlighted the ongoing confusion about reuse and the need to clear it up to prioritize it at the INC-4 meeting.

To make an impact, event organizers opted for a novel approach: a game-show format that tested delegates' knowledge and attitudes about reuse before experts clarified any misunderstandings. This performance was developed during a two-day workshop and aimed to dispel myths that might prevent countries from supporting reuse in the treaty.

Professor Steve Fletcher, Director of the Revolution Plastics Institute, expressed optimism that reuse could be a relatively straightforward measure to agree on compared to more contentious issues like production caps or material bans. Dr. Erika Hughes, Interim Head of the School of Film, Media, and Communication at the University of Portsmouth, noted that the performance showcased reuse and its global champions, aiming to positively influence how reuse is framed in the treaty.

Fair and Inclusive Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) in the Global South

As the international community moves towards a legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution, understanding how EPR can be designed and implemented to reduce plastic pollution, increase plastic recovery rates, and improve working conditions and livelihoods in the informal recycling sector (IRS) is crucial. To bridge this knowledge gap, this policy brief draws on existing knowledge and perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for fair and inclusive EPR schemes in the Global South, including insights from a webinar organized by GRID-Arendal and NIVA through the International Knowledge Hub Against Plastic Pollution (IKHAPP 2023).

This IKHAPP policy brief (IKHAPP, 2024) builds on existing knowledge and perspectives regarding fair and inclusive EPR schemes in the Global South.

EPR is a cross-cutting issue that spans the entire plastic lifecycle. Therefore, fair and inclusive EPR must be integrated with other provisions and obligations of the plastics treaty, encompassing waste management, sustainability, just transition, and implementation measures.

The Zero Draft and subsequent revisions of the global plastics treaty have outlined potential options for EPR. Discussions have emphasized a just transition for waste pickers and other IRS workers, highlighting the necessity of integrating these workers into EPR and waste management systems. As the fourth meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-4) kicks off in Ottawa, Canada, next week, these discussions will be particularly relevant. Contributing author, Emmy Nøklebye (NIVA), will participate and share her insights in the side event “Asia in Focus: Multi-Stakeholder Knowledge Sharing on Plastic Initiatives,” organized by the Ministry of Environment of Japan, ERIA, and IGES, in partnership with OECD, IUCN, and NIVA.

Reflections & Recommendations for the future

- **Importance of sustainability and education**

Sustainability lies at the heart of efforts to combat plastic pollution, offering a holistic framework for promoting responsible consumption, production, and waste management practices. Universities have a responsibility to lead by example by implementing sustainable practices on campus, such as reducing single-use plastics, implementing recycling programs, and promoting eco-friendly alternatives. By integrating sustainability into campus operations, universities can demonstrate their commitment to environmental stewardship and inspire broader societal change.

Education plays a pivotal role in raising awareness about the environmental impact of plastic pollution and empowering individuals to make informed choices. Universities have a unique opportunity to integrate sustainability principles into curricula across disciplines, ensuring that all students graduate with a comprehensive understanding of environmental issues and solutions. Additionally, universities can offer extracurricular programs, workshops, and community outreach initiatives to engage students, faculty, and the public in environmental education and advocacy efforts.

Over the last years of running CP3's educational programs focused on raising awareness on the plastic crisis, and providing experiential learning opportunities for researchers, community members, and Concordia University projects such as assisting in 4 capstone projects, creating the Concordia Engagement awards made from 100% recycled plastics, and additional prototypes, it has become clear the importance of plastic recycling spaces dedicated to learning how to value plastic waste as a durable material for upcycled purposes, and we seek to continue doing so through Recycla.

- **Role of scientific collaborations**

While it is the general scientific community's position that we have enough science to take action now, it was also made clear during INC-4 that we need to continue to rely on robust scientific information to determine sector-specific plastics of concern as well as tracking and monitoring our progress. There is also now, more than ever, a need for innovation to find creative solutions and alternatives. At the same time it is imperative that we ensure that these

solutions are safe for the environment and are not regrettable substitutions. Scientific collaborations can help fulfill these calls to action. Investing in and fostering these new scientific collaborations can put Concordia University at the forefront of the fight against plastic pollution at a time where it is most needed.

- **Role of data collection, management, and reporting**

Data collection plays a critical role in addressing the plastic crisis by providing insights into the magnitude, and impact of plastic consumption and disposal practices being essential for informing evidence-based decision-making efforts to address plastic pollution.

Given the inconsistent methodologies for waste data gathering, lack of transparency amongst waste haulers, the usage of informal waste picking practices, and the different systems used to monitor waste, it has been proven difficult to create a standardized way to report on plastic pollution. When states use mixed recycling systems, separating and accounting for the plastic waste separately becomes an even greater challenge, as it is the case for Montreal.

Recognizing the importance of standardized data on plastic pollution, several global initiatives have been launched to improve data collection and reporting. Organizations like the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the World Bank support projects aimed at strengthening waste management systems and enhancing data collection capacities in both developed and developing countries. Initiatives such as the Federal Plastics Registry by the Government of Canada, the Marine Debris Monitoring and Assessment Project (MEDMAP), the Global Plastic Action Partnership (GPAP), and many more are focusing on gathering data, and communicating plastic waste data to inform both local and global strategies for tackling plastic pollution.

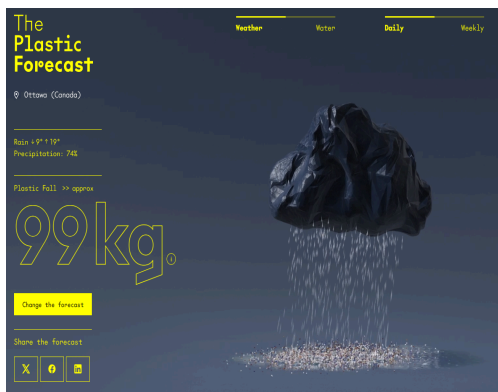
- **The role of Art and Design**

In many ways one of the main overarching themes of the inc-4 was communication. In the span of 9 days we have witnessed the whole range of communication styles. From the ultra formal style of the plenary hall, to the propaganda trucks, from the very technical data report, to the inspiring talk and the attention grabbing art installation.

In this space we entered every one was an expert in a specific field. Everyone was trying to convey a complex message and was confronted with the great challenges of bridging the gap of knowledge with the interlocutor. Some stakeholders in the negotiations like the scientist coalition relied on their stance of authority on the subject matter to convey their messages. Although very clear and concise recommendations did not seem to leave the confines of the shaw center and percolated through the chatter to reach and influence public opinions.

The member states are left with a dilemma of science vs the interest of the constituents. Is the public outcry loud enough to warrant action that will impact the status quo?

To that effect, art can be leveraged to get the message across. The main artistic attraction of the event was Benjamin Von Wong's sculptural installation entitled The Giant Plastic Tap in front of the shaw center. The artwork is meant to symbolize the need to shift the conversation away from the end of life cycle solutions. Working in conjunction with the #TurnOffThePlasticTap hashtag campaign on socials, this artwork acts as a rallying cry for a strong treaty. At the same time it is able to function as an effective stepping stone between the world of the INCs and the public by intermediary of news media.



While effective at grabbing your attention The Giant Plastic Tap, is lacking depth in some ways. If not mediated by an expert for example It does little to address the reasons why we need to close the plastic tap. This forces us to rely again on the dynamic of authority and trust to convey crucial information across the knowledge gap.

The Plastic Forecast, brought forward by the Minderoo foundation in partnership with marketing agency m&c saatchi and design studio Collider, is far more effective at communicating scientific information through clever meshing of art and science. The artwork combines the familiar concept of a weather forecast with scientific data collection and fantastic motion graphics to present the problem of microplastic.

Personal statements

- **Natasha Liberman Santos**

First and foremost, I would like to thank Concordia University for this opportunity. The barriers of entry for events such as this one are incredibly high. Being able to represent youth, even if in a small manner, at a United Nations conference of this level is an experience not to be taken for granted. Political decision-making is known to be a closed-door process, of which young individuals are not apart. Witnessing the true complexity behind these negotiations, the different realities brought to the table by such diverse countries and the magnitude of all that is related to plastic made me realize the importance of local initiatives and of the local movement. Concordia University is not only an accredited University of UNEP, but it has a thriving local sustainability ecosystem. Being able to connect these two worlds was certainly an eye-opening moment for me. Sustainability is not always a priority on the local agenda, but a global plastic treaty is on its way, and there is nothing more powerful than being exposed to experiential learning through initiatives like CP3 to fully understand why plastic is a complicated issue, how it should be addressed, who is involved in it and why as an individual learning, sharing the knowledge, and getting involved can be the way out of inaction. Being at INC-4 allowed me to see that even though some doors are difficult to open, there are still windows of opportunities for people like us to show up, observe and do things differently.

- **Miguel Felismino**

I came into this meeting wearing three hats: first, a scientist that's willing and able to provide robust and reliable information to those who need it; second, a student trying to understand the nuances and difficulties of creating an international agreement; and third, a concerned citizen who wants to know how national and international governing bodies will tackle our global fight against plastic pollution. I put my key takeaways in the context of these three hats. First, as a scientist, I came into INC-4 knowing that conflicts of interest can limit the contribution of science with regards to policy. Attending this meeting allowed me to see first-hand how scientific facts can be questioned, manipulated and ultimately, ignored to fit a group's specific agenda. Though at surface level this was upsetting, it did inspire me to make sure that we, as a scientific community, find ways to make our voices louder and clearer so that it is less likely to be ignored. Second, as a student, I realized that there is much more complexity to these international negotiations than I could have ever imagined. I think as outside observers we often look at meetings like these in a results-based lens. There is this notion that negotiation meetings which

do not produce a treaty is just another one of the many failures of international collaboration. INC-4 has made me somewhat more compassionate, especially after seeing countries try to achieve a noble goal only to be stonewalled by countries unwilling to prioritize the planet over profits. And last, as a concerned citizen, I remain wearily hopeful that the efforts of these INCs will produce a treaty that is good enough to protect us from our self-inflicted crisis. At the very least, it solidified my wishful thinking that having these international discussions will bring to light what needs to be done and how to do it properly.

- **Samita Mandjee**

Attending this UNEP conference has been an incredible opportunity. It not only broadened my understanding of the complexities of plastic production and management but also reinforced my belief in the importance of collective actions and responsibilities. I am deeply grateful to Concordia University for providing us with this opportunity.

From CEED's perspective, these UNEP negotiations offered a chance to witness the extensive network of NGOs and agencies working toward similar goals on an international scale. Engaging in discussions with various African groups, I realized that many actors in the sustainability realm can collaborate for a positive outcome. However, observing the arduous process of negotiating a legally binding text was overwhelming, highlighting the power dynamics among powerful countries, lobbyists, developing nations, and civil society actors. This made me momentarily question the relevance of personal actions in living a sustainable life, wondering about the overall impact of our efforts.

Nevertheless, hearing powerful statements from youth, indigenous groups, and individuals directly affected by the plastic crisis reignited my passion for pursuing our work toward a sustainable future for everyone.

- **Wanda Stamford**

I am grateful for the support Concordia University has provided to us in order to be present at the INC-4. It was beautiful to witness the Concordia sustainability community who came together to support us in observing such a historical event.

As an enthusiast in tackling this aspect of the climate crisis, to be present during these negotiations felt both an overwhelming, and inspiring feeling, where the lingering thoughts past the event carry great inspirations for future actions. The overwhelming part came from living such long days, and witnessing the complexity and hardships of reaching an agreement on a

global scale on how to address plastic pollution. On the other hand, it felt inspiring to see many organizations, and attendees' commitment to addressing the plastic crisis at their own scale, to deeply reflect on the power of collective action to address systemic problems by improving certain processes. I left Ottawa feeling inspired to use my distress as a change catalyst to continue addressing the plastic crisis locally, while keeping the international scope in mind. Now more than ever, I feel that it is possible to make a positive impact in our local environments by rethinking plastic usage, and creating spaces to safely create using this material.

- **Félix Beaudry**

The INC-4 was a unique opportunity to see the problem of plastic pollution under countless aspects. It will leave an impact on me and all the students that pass by Atelier Écodesign and CP3. I doubt the treaty will be as ambitious in scope and commitment as most militant orgs would want it to be. But it got many of us in the field now connected and organized through coalitions, pacts, alliances and friendships. We can still be ambitious and implement changes in our work environment that align with the recommendations from the experts. For those of us working in teaching institutions, it is imperative that we keep offering ways for the youth to be actively part of the grand scheme solutions and to be very careful not to limit their reach to their personal environmental impact. The plastic crisis is one of those wicked problems that cannot be solved by working in silos. Most interdisciplinary workspaces in teaching institutions are maker spaces focused on tech or gated graduate research labs . While techno-literacy is important, there is an even bigger need for an open and interdisciplinary workspaces dedicated to environmentally engaged projects.

- **Pramila Choudhary**

Representing and participating as part of the young coalition team from Concordia University at the UNEP INC-4 was a unique and enriching experience. Prior to my ongoing PhD at the university, I accumulated extensive industry experience, working closely with materials, communities, government schemes, non-profit organizations, and various industries. These experiences have always made me wonder how to engage in crucial conversations and be part of meaningful change.

At UNEP INC-4, working with CP3 and handling plastic waste for recycling provided valuable insights into the complexities of plastic production and management. It reinforced my belief in the importance of collective actions and responsibilities. Observing the negotiation process was

overwhelming, highlighting power dynamics among powerful countries, lobbyists, developing nations, and civil society actors. These kinds of opportunities are important for students of all levels and experiences to bring about real-time change. Being at INC-4 showed that despite challenges, there are opportunities for engagement and change. Sustainability is not always a local priority, but a global plastic treaty is emerging. Experiential learning through initiatives like CP3 helps understand the complexities of plastic issues and the importance of individual and collective actions.

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