

Countries tussle at 'rocky' global plastic talks

May 31 2023, by Kelly MACNAMARA



Plastic waste has become an environmental challenge across the world.

Negotiators charged with hammering out a global treaty to end plastic pollution were warned there was "no time to lose" on Wednesday, after progress was slowed by two days of procedural debates that campaigners blamed on large producer countries.

Representatives of 175 nations have gathered in Paris for the second in five rounds of negotiations aimed at reaching a historic legally-binding agreement covering the entire plastics life cycle by next year.

But halfway through the five-day meeting, countries have struggled to dig into a range of substantial issues as they race to greenlight the creation of a tentative first draft this week, so it can be ready for the next round of talks in November.

Frustrations bubbled up on Wednesday after two days of delays as nations tussled over procedural rules, as large producer nations, including fossil fuel supplier Saudi Arabia, as well as China and India, resisted the idea the deal could be decided by a vote.

"We are suffering the effects of pollution due to unsustainable production and consumption of plastics, insufficient waste management and insufficient recycling capabilities," the representative for Samoa, on behalf of small island nations, told the meeting.

"We have no time to lose. Now we have less time to lose."

A document outlining policy actions up for debate lists bans on single use [plastic items](#), restrictions on certain chemicals, cuts in production and consumption, as well as ideas around extending the responsibility of producers over the waste of their products.

Annual plastics production has more than doubled in 20 years to 460 million tons, and is on track to triple within four decades.

With less than 10 percent recycled and more than a fifth dumped or burned illegally, [environmental groups](#) are pushing for the treaty to both deal with the pollution and curb the scale of production.

"The world needs urgently an international plastic treaty, one that regulates production, one that addresses pollution from its very source," said Li Shuo of Greenpeace.

Dynamics between countries echoes those in international climate negotiations, where "big producer countries are on the defense", he told AFP, adding that producers want to focus on pollution and not cuts in how much [plastic](#) is made.

'Chasm'

Delays this week have caused concern because there are only 15 more days of negotiations in three rounds of talks left before the treaty is due to be agreed.

Negotiations went late into the night Tuesday, with observers from the Earth Negotiations Bulletin describing the stalemate in the talks on Tuesday as a "chasm widened" between those in support of consensus decision making—which can be more protracted—and those who want to allow voting to break any deadlock.

With the Paris meeting set to wrap up on Friday, countries eventually agreed to take note of the differences of opinion and move on.

Li Shuo said that while the talks had got off to a "very rocky start", some concerns over voting were understandable for this kind of [global treaty](#), adding ultimately nations were determined to come to an agreement by consensus and on time.

Concern over plastics has surged as fragmented microplastics have been found on some of the world's highest mountains, in the depths of the oceans, in the stomachs of sea birds and in human blood, breast milk and placentas.

Plastic also contributes to [global warming](#), accounting for 3.4 percent of global emissions in 2019, according to the OECD.

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