

Need for a Global Plastic Treaty: Securing a Sustainable Future

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What's in today's article?

- Why in News?
- Background:
- Need for a global plastic treaty
- Agendas of the negotiation
- India's position on the Global Plastic Treaty

Why in News?

Representatives from over 170 countries have gathered in Busan, South Korea, for the fifth and final round of negotiations on a legally binding global treaty to end plastic pollution, including marine pollution.

This initiative follows the 2022 UN Environmental Assembly's agreement to finalize the treaty by the end of 2024.

Background:

- **Resolution to end plastic pollution:**

- The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) passed a resolution to “end plastic pollution” in 2022.

- **Setting up of an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC)**

- INC was set up and tasked to develop a legally binding instrument – a global treaty – to govern plastic production and use across all nations.

- **Global Plastics Treaty:**

- In 2022, 175 nations agreed to develop a legally binding agreement on plastic pollution by 2024 to reduce GHG emissions from plastic production, use and disposal.

Need for a global plastic treaty

- **The Growing Dependence on Plastic**

- Plastic’s versatile and adaptable properties have made it indispensable, leading to a surge in global production, which doubled from 234 million tonnes in 2000 to 460 million tonnes in 2019.
- By 2040, production is projected to reach 700 million tonnes.

- **Plastic Waste and Environmental Crisis**

- Plastic decomposition takes 20–500 years, with less than 10% recycled to date.
- Annual plastic waste generation is approximately 400 million tonnes and could increase by 62% by 2050.
- A significant amount of waste leaks into rivers and oceans, breaking down into harmful microplastics and nanoplastics.

- **Impact on Environment and Health**

- Plastic waste threatens ecosystems and human health. Chemicals in plastics can cause endocrine disruption, cancer, diabetes, reproductive disorders, and neurodevelopmental impairments.
- Marine, freshwater, and terrestrial species are severely affected.

- **Plastic’s Role in Climate Change**

- Plastic production and waste management contribute significantly to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.
- In 2020, plastics accounted for 3.6% of global emissions, primarily from fossil fuel-based production. Emissions could increase by 20% by 2050 if trends persist.

- **India’s Contribution to Plastic Pollution**

- India is the largest contributor to global plastic pollution, accounting for 20% of emissions (9.3 million tonnes annually), surpassing Nigeria (3.5 mt), Indonesia (3.4 mt), and China (2.8 mt).

What is on the negotiating table?

- **Focus of Negotiations**

- The talks aim to establish global rules to tackle plastic pollution across its lifecycle, from production to disposal.
- Proposed measures include banning specific plastics, setting binding recycling targets, and regulating chemical additives in plastics.

- **‘Just Transition’ Considerations**

- Discussions include ensuring a fair transition for workers, communities, and livelihoods affected by reduced plastic production and the elimination of certain products.

- **Diverging Positions Among Nations**

- Countries remain divided on key issues, particularly on production caps for plastics:
 - **Opposition to Production Caps:** Oil and gas-rich nations like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia, and India oppose strict production limits, favoring downstream measures like improved waste management.
 - **Support for Ambitious Targets:** Rwanda, Peru, and the EU advocate aggressive pollution reduction, with Rwanda proposing a 40% cut by 2040 using 2025 as the baseline.

India’s Stance on the Global Plastic Treaty

- **Opposition to Production Caps**

- India opposes restrictions on polymer production, arguing that such measures exceed the UNEA 2022 resolution’s mandate.

- **Focus on Financial and Technical Assistance**

- India advocates for financial aid, technology transfer, and technical support to be part of the treaty’s core provisions.

- **Regulation of Harmful Chemicals**

- Decisions on harmful chemicals in plastic production should be based on scientific studies and regulated domestically.

- **Approach to Plastic Phase-Out**

- While India banned 19 categories of single-use plastics in 2022, it emphasizes that any phase-out in the treaty should be pragmatic and driven by national circumstances.
 - **In 2022**, India brought into effect the **Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules (2021)** that banned 19 categories of single-use plastics.

- **Safe Waste Management Mechanism**

- India calls for mechanisms to assess infrastructure needs, financial requirements, and predictable funding for scientific and safe waste management.
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Q.1. Why is a global plastic treaty needed?

A global plastic treaty is crucial to combat the growing environmental crisis, reduce plastic waste, and minimize its harmful effects on ecosystems and human health while addressing greenhouse gas emissions from plastic production.

Q.2. What is India’s stance on the global plastic treaty?

India opposes strict production caps on plastics, focusing instead on financial and technical support, regulation of harmful chemicals, and pragmatic national approaches to plastic phase-out and waste management.

News: [Why the world needs a global plastic treaty](#) | [Down to Earth](#) | [Live Mint](#)

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