March 6, 2023

Dear Dr. Orellana,

Thank you for the opportunity to share input to inform the preparation of the thematic report on the toxic impacts of some climate solutions for the UN Human Rights Council.

Plastic Pollution Coalition is a non-profit communications and advocacy organization that collaborates with an expansive global alliance of organizations, businesses, and individuals to create a more just, equitable, regenerative world free of plastic pollution and its toxic impacts.

As governing bodies make agreements and take action to address the climate crisis on a global scale, fossil fuel industries have reacted to new regulations on burning these greenhouse-gas emitting fuels by ramping up plastics production. What’s more, the fossil fuel and plastic industries commonly emphasize the “need” for lightweight plastic products as part of a “low-carbon” future. Not only is this argument inaccurate, as plastic’s production and existence is a major contributor to the climate crisis[[1]](#footnote-0), but it ignores plastics’ toxic pollution that harms people and other living beings, and the Earth all life needs to survive.

More than ninety-nine percent of plastics are made of chemicals sourced from fossil fuels, and fossil fuel energy is overwhelmingly used to extract, transport, and refine fossil fuels; and power production and shipment of plastics.[[2]](#footnote-1) Plastics drive the climate crisis and toxic pollution from the moment their fossil fuel ingredients are extracted to when they are deposited in landfills, the environment[[3]](#footnote-2), or combusted in incinerators[[4]](#footnote-3) or open burns.[[5]](#footnote-4) Plastics and the tiny particles they shed (called microplastics and nanoplastics)[[6]](#footnote-5) pollute indoor[[7]](#footnote-6) and outdoor air[[8]](#footnote-7), fresh waters, soils[[9]](#footnote-8), oceans[[10]](#footnote-9), wildlife[[11]](#footnote-10), and human bodies[[12]](#footnote-11).

Additionally, plastics are made with thousands of chemicals that easily leach out into living bodies and ecosystems. Many of these chemicals are known to be harmful to humans and other animals.[[13]](#footnote-12) Plastics and their fossil fuel ingredients especially harm the Black and Indigenous peoples, and other people of color, as well as low-income, and rural communities, especially in the Global South, that are disproportionately targeted for industrial infrastructure and activities and plastic disposal. Such communities are already underserved and exposed to myriad forms of environmental injustice based on racial and class discrimination.[[14]](#footnote-13)

**We urge the Human Rights council to take into consideration the toxic relationship between plastics and fossil fuels, the outsized harm to human rights and to acknowledge a need for urgent action. We strongly recommend solutions that stop plastic pollution and greenhouse gas emissions at the source. This includes systems that facilitate growth and use of nontoxic regenerative materials that have been used by humans for time immemorial, such as algae and mushroom; reuse, refill, and share systems that eliminate the need for new materials to be produced; education and opportunities for people to repair the material items they have. All solutions must be just and equitable, nontoxic, respectful of people and the Earth, and led by and for communities to meet local needs.[[15]](#footnote-14) At the same time, industries must be held accountable for harm done, and serious efforts must be made to remediate communities and the environment to eliminate toxic exposure to existing pollution.**

The truly circular solutions we outline above must be incorporated into a toxic-free plan for decarbonization to alleviate the lethal impacts of fossil fuel and plastics production, transportation, use, and disposal on the global population, and particularly impacted communities. It will be important that governing bodies do not fall prey to industries’ greenwashed definition of “circular economy,” in which these industries define circularity through plastics recycling (mechanical and “chemical/advanced”), as well as plastics “waste-to-energy” (incineration/burning). In reality, few plastics have historically been recycled[[16]](#footnote-15) due to their toxic nature and chemical structure which diminishes in integrity when reprocessed, and, importantly, the economic lucrativeness of producing more freshly produced plastics. Governing bodies should also avoid industries’ attempts to expand production of so-called “bioplastics,” which are not inherently biodegradable nor nontoxic, and often contain the same fossil fuel ingredients and harmful additives found in conventional fossil-fuel based plastics.[[17]](#footnote-16)

Thank you for your kind attention. We welcome the opportunity to contribute and look forward to reviewing your report in September.

Sincerely,

Erica Cirino, on behalf of Plastic Pollution Coalition

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