



By: TA | AP Insight

Has the last opportunity to solve global plastic pollution been missed?



The global conference on solving plastic pollution did not pass a legally binding treaty, thus leaving one of the biggest environmental problems unresolved.

Fears that the main obstacle will be limiting the production of plastic have come true

Talks on a treaty to address the global crisis of plastic pollution in Geneva ended without an agreement Friday as the session was adjourned with plans to resume at a later date.

Nations were **meeting** for an 11th day at the United Nations office to try to complete a landmark treaty to end the plastic pollution **crisis**.

They remain deadlocked over whether the treaty should reduce exponential growth of plastic production and put global, legally binding controls on toxic chemicals used to make plastics. Most plastic is made from fossil fuels.

Inger Andersen, executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme, said despite challenges, despite the disappointment, “we have to accept that significant progress was made.”

This process won’t stop, she said, but it’s too soon to say how long it will take to get a treaty now.

The Youth Plastic Action Network was the only organization to speak at the closing meeting Friday. Comments from observers were cut off at the request of the U.S. and Kuwait after 24 hours of meetings and negotiating.

The negotiations at the U.N. hub were supposed to be the last round and produce the first legally binding treaty on plastic pollution, including in the oceans. But just like at the **meeting** in South Korea last year, they’re leaving without a treaty.

Luis Vayas Valdivieso, the chair of the negotiating committee, wrote and presented two drafts of treaty text in Geneva based on the views expressed by the nations. The

representatives from 184 countries did not agree to use either one as the basis for their negotiations.

Valdivieso said Friday morning as the delegates reconvened in the assembly hall that no further action is being proposed at this stage on the latest draft.

After a three-hour meeting, he banged a gavel made of recycled plastic bottle tops from a Nairobi landfill.

A ‘deeply disappointing’ outcome

Representatives of Norway, Australia, Tuvalu and others nations said they were deeply disappointed to be leaving Geneva without a treaty. Madagascar said the world is “expecting action, not reports from us.”

European Commissioner Jessika Roswall said the European Union and its member states had higher expectations for this meeting and while the draft falls short on their demands, it’s a good basis for another negotiating session.

China's delegation said that this temporary setback is a new starting point to forge consensus

“The Earth is not ours only. We are stewards for those who come after us. Let us fulfill that duty,” she said.

China's delegation said the fight against plastic pollution is a long marathon and that this temporary setback is a new starting point to forge consensus. It urged nations to work together to offer future generations a blue planet without plastic pollution.

Lots of red lines

The biggest issue of the talks has been

whether the treaty should impose caps on producing new plastic or focus instead on things like better design, recycling and reuse.

Powerful oil- and gas-producing nations and the plastics industry oppose production limits. They want a treaty focused on better waste management and reuse.

Saudi Arabia said both drafts lacked balance, and Saudi and Kuwaiti negotiators said the latest proposal takes other states' views more into account. It addressed plastic production, which they consider outside the scope of the treaty.

That draft, released early Friday, did not include a limit on plastic production, but recognized that current levels of production and consumption are “unsustainable” and global action is needed.

New language had been added to say these levels exceed current waste management capacities and are projected to increase further, “thereby necessitating a coordinated global response to halt and reverse such trends.”

The objective of the treaty was revamped to state that the accord would be based on a comprehensive approach that addresses the full lifecycle of plastics.

A compromise means that we have to bend our red lines - Magnus Heunicke

It talked about reducing plastic products containing “a chemical or chemicals of concern to human health or the environment,” as well as reducing of single-use or short-lived plastic products.

It was a much better, more ambitious text, though not perfect. But each country came to Geneva with a lot of “red lines,” said Magnus Heunicke, the Danish environment minister. Denmark holds the rotating presidency of the Council of Europe.

“To be very clear, a compromise means that we have to bend our red lines,” he said.

For its part, Iran said it's a disappointing moment and faulted “nontransparent and non-inclusive processes on unrealistic elements,” particularly chemicals.

The plastics industry also urged compromise. The Global Partners for Plastics Circularity said in a statement that governments must move past entrenched positions to finalize an agreement reflecting their shared priorities.

No consensus

For any proposal to make it into the treaty, every nation must agree. India, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait, Vietnam and others have said that consensus is vital to an effective treaty.

Some countries want to change the process so decisions may be made by a vote if necessary.



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Graham Forbes, head of the Greenpeace delegation in Geneva, urged delegates in that direction.

“We are going in circles. We cannot continue to do the same thing and expect a different result,” he said as Friday's meeting was ending.

The International Pollutants Elimination Network said what happened in Geneva showed “consensus is dead” for the process to

move forward.

Thursday was the last scheduled day of **negotiations**, but work on the revised draft continued into Friday.

Every year, the world makes more than 400 million tons of new plastic, and that could **grow** by about 70% by 2040 without policy changes. About 100 countries want to limit production. Many have said it's also essential to address toxic chemicals used to make plastics.

Science shows what it will take to end pollution and protect human health, said Bethanie Carney Almroth, an ecotoxicology professor at Sweden's University of Gothenburg who coleads the Scientists' Coalition for an Effective Plastics Treaty.

The science supports addressing the full lifecycle of plastics, beginning with extraction and production, and restricting some chemicals to ensure plastics are safer and more sustainable, she added.

"The science has not changed," she said. "It cannot be down negotiated."

Environmentalists, waste pickers and Indigenous leaders and many business executives traveled to the talks to make their voices heard. Some used creative **tactics**, but are leaving disappointed.

Indigenous leaders sought a treaty that recognizes their rights and knowledge. Frankie Orona, executive director of the Texas-based Society of Native Nations, said the best option now is to move forward with more negotiations to "fight for a treaty that truly safeguards people and the planet."