

Statement NGO Major Group - Plenary, UNEA3

Let us not hide the reality: we are far from a world without pollution! A pollution-free planet needs strong political will and leadership, and effective environmental regulations which take into account the relationship with all human rights. It is time to recognize the right of this and future generations to live in a healthy and pollution free environment. We insist that pollution should be prevented, not simply cleaned up afterwards. In that respect, discussions on marine litter and microplastics need to consider upstream solutions, and address the rapidly rising production and use of plastics in a global binding instrument, rather than merely try to manage the waste streams. Similarly, hazardous pesticides cannot be merely “managed”, and we should therefore rapidly start discussions for a global convention to phase them out.

We must also find a way to subject all actors to adequate rules and ensure that the ongoing negotiations on a binding agreement on human rights and transnational corporations moves forward and specifically includes environmental issues.

As the Ministerial Declaration of the UNEA 3 mentions, to better prevent, mitigate, and manage pollution, we must have better indicators and disaggregated data. The existing indicators measuring the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 fail to take into account the role of environmental law in achieving these goals. It is now necessary to fill the knowledge gap and to set up **legal indicators**, which would provide data for better governance and document the effectiveness of environmental pollution laws.

We would also like to express our disappointment that during all discussions a major polluting activity - intensive agriculture - has hardly been mentioned, despite being responsible for huge pollution in the soil, air, water, and within human bodies. Without transforming our food and agricultural systems, including agro-ecological solutions, we will never achieve a pollution free planet.

Mr Chair, we know the ambitions for UN Environment are already very high, but we hope that the many other forms of pollution that have not been discussed by delegates will also find their way into the future work programme. They are no less threatening. They are no less urgent. They include marine noise, light, nanoparticles, and radioactive pollution among many others that have not made their way into this week’s discussions.

We were pleased to see progress on lead (a century old pollutant) and an agreement to initiate a process to discuss plastic pollution - though this discussion risks being rapidly outpaced by the unchecked rise of plastic production and use. While transparency and access to information is recognized as critical to ensure environmentally sound decisions, we are concerned that businesses still refuse to disclose information about chemicals in products they make denying consumers the right to know. Some want to label NGOs as anti-business, but we actively support businesses that promote agro ecology and green design without toxic substances, and businesses that respect the rights and protect the health of communities in which they operate. Privatizing the profits and socializing the losses is simply unacceptable, and UNEA3 should not be blind to that fact.