



Forum: 2nd Committee (Environmental & Cultural)

Issue: International cooperation in combating plastic pollution

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Introduction

The problem of plastic pollution becomes more and more discussed in recent years. The point is that plastics is the most littered items in the world. Plastic pollution can afflict land, waterways, and oceans. Sea animals can be harmed either by mechanical effects, such as entanglement in plastic objects or problems related to ingestion of plastic waste, or through exposure to chemicals within plastic. Humans are also affected by plastic pollution. Chemicals leached from some plastics used in food and beverage storage are harmful to human health. Correlations have been shown between levels of some of these chemicals, and an increased risk of problems such as chromosomal system abnormalities, impaired brain and neurological functions, cancer and many others.

One of the most harmful features of plastic is its long-term decomposition. The chemical structure of most plastics renders them resistant to many natural processes of degradation and as a result they are slow to degrade. At the same time plastic is inexpensive in production, and durable - together, these two factors have led to a high prominence of plastic pollution in the environment. Even though there is a tendency towards creating different forms of reducible plastic, the problem of sorting still remains very urgent, as well as the number of recycling factories. All these facts show us that coordinated common efforts should be undertaken by the global community in order to protect our planet from plastic pollution.

Definition of key terms

Plastic pollution – the accumulation of plastic objects in the Earth's environment that adversely affects wildlife, wildlife habitat, and humans.

Decomposition – the process of decay and destruction of matter, including waste.

Background information

1) General overview

Since such a compound as plastic was obtained, things made of it quickly gained popularity, and now it will be much more difficult to bring plastic out of circulation than half a century ago. People have produced more plastic in the last few years than in the rest of human history. According to statistics, From the 1950s up to 2018, an estimated 6.3 billion tons of plastic has been produced worldwide, of which an estimated 9% has been recycled and another 12% has been incinerated. For example, in the UK alone, more than 5 million tonnes of plastic are consumed each year, of which only an estimated one-quarter is recycled, with the remainder going to landfills. This large amount of plastic waste inevitably enters the environment, with studies suggesting that the bodies of 90% of seabirds contain plastic debris.

According to some estimates, by the year 2050, there will be more plastic in the oceans than fish. This evaluation is threatening. The results of plastic pollution are especially evident when we consider marine life. There were a lot of cases, when people found marine animals, for instance, whales, that were dead because of ingesting of plastic bags or some other types of plastic waste. Due to the nature of our throw-away society, almost half of the plastic we use is disposed of after being used only once. A plastic bag, for example, has an average working life of 15 minutes but can remain in the ocean for up to 20 years. Other plastics need hundreds of years to fully decompose. As a result, people find these bags inside dead animals.

There was a previously established pattern of how countries dealt with the problem of waste: the majority of developed countries have thrown off all the waste in China, Indonesia, etc. Now there are entire cities-landfills, where people almost manually sort these plastic bottles. What these countries cannot process (because the volumes are enormous), is dumped into the ocean or remains in landfills further, and then is split at the micro level and affects living organisms, the environment, even penetrates the water that people drink. Since it is easier to export plastic waste, many countries cannot develop the industry associated with the processing of plastic as it is very costly. The picture began to change not so long ago, when China refused to further import plastic. Now all countries start to turn to new technologies and try to implement biofriendly plastics in the production of large companies because one way or another depended on this cooperation.

The main problem is that it is cheaper to burn plastic, but in all senses it is dangerous, and it is expensive and difficult to process, because plastic is just a

generalized name, in fact, each thing which was made from plastic has its own impurities. This in turn means that every detail has its own approach. Also one of the most serious problem is the cooperation of all countries, within each country-the introduction of processing mechanisms.

2) Types of plastic waste

There are three major forms of plastic that contribute to plastic pollution: microplastics as well as mega- and macro-plastics. Mega- and micro plastics have accumulated in highest densities in the Northern Hemisphere, concentrated around urban centers and water fronts. Plastic can be found off the coast of some islands because of currents carrying the debris. Both mega- and macro-plastics are found in packaging, footwear, and other domestic items that have been washed off of ships or discarded in landfills. Fishing-related items are more likely to be found around remote islands. These may also be referred to as micro-, meso-, and macro debris.

- **Microdebris**

This is the type of plastic pieces between 2 mm and 5 mm in size. Sometimes this type of plastic is called nurdles, and these pieces are usually recycled to make new plastic items. Yet, quite often these tiny particles of plastic are released into the environment where they end up in ocean waters through rivers and streams. As these pieces are very small, they can easily be ingested even by filter-feeding organisms.

- **Macroderbis**

This term refers to plastic pieces that are bigger than 20 mm in size. Macrodebris are often found in ocean waters and can have a serious impact on the native organisms. Fishing nets have been prime pollutants. Even after they have been abandoned, they continue to trap marine organisms and other plastic debris. Eventually, these abandoned nets become too difficult to remove from the water because they become too heavy, having grown in weight up to 6 tons.

Major countries and organizations involved

Nowadays it is hard to select several countries, as the issue of plastic pollution becomes more and more serious affecting not only particular countries, but the whole

planet and its biosphere. Therefore, it is more sensible to describe those organizations that are concerned with the issue of plastic pollution and that help countries to deal with this problem.

United Nations Environment Program

UN Environment, or the UNEP, is an agency of the United Nations that coordinates the organization's environmental activities and assists developing countries in implementing environmentally sound policies and practices. UNEP's activities cover a wide range of issues regarding the atmosphere, marine and terrestrial ecosystems, environmental governance and green economy. It has played a significant role in developing international environmental conventions, promoting environmental science and information and illustrating the way those can be implemented in conjunction with policy, working on the development and implementation of policy with national governments, regional institutions in conjunction with environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Greenpeace

One of the most well-known international independent organization founded in 1971 in Canada that “uses peaceful, creative confrontation to expose global environmental problems, and develop solutions for a green and peaceful future”. The main aims of the organization include prevention of global warming, protection of bio-diversity, slowing the rate of hyper-consumption, and promotion of renewable energy. As an environmental organization, it is concerned by plastic and waste pollution as well.

Oceana

Oceana, founded in 2001, is the largest international advocacy organization focused solely on ocean conservation. Oceana seeks to make our oceans more biodiverse and abundant by winning policy victories in the countries that govern much of the world's marine life.

Surfrider Foundation

The mission of this organization is to protect (and enjoy) oceans waves and beaches through a powerful activist network.

Zero Waste Europe

Being registered in 2014 this organization, in fact, has been working from 2011. The main aim of Zero Waste Europe is to eliminate waste in our society. Different groups of

Zero Waste have been collaborating on a voluntary basis organising events, and building off of the work done by the European members of the GAIA network. The organization also organizes annual meetings in different European cities.

The 5 Gyres Institute

The institute is a non-profit organization that focuses on reducing plastics pollution by focusing on primary research. Programs concentrate on science, education and adventure (research expeditions for citizen-scientists). 5 Gyres was the first organization to research plastic pollution in all five main subtropical gyres and first to determine how much plastic is on the surface of the world's oceans: nearly 270,000 metric tons and 5.25 trillion pieces.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Under the auspices of UNEP, a world campaign against marine debris has been launched. The example of the Italian city of Capannori with the population of 46700 people is indicative. In 2007, a zero waste strategy was introduced here. For ten years, the volume of garbage has been reduced by 40 percent. At the same time, only 18 per cent of the waste goes to landfills. Also, more than 40 countries have established legal restrictions and prohibitions on the use of plastic bags in their territories.

Recently, several other events connected with plastic pollution took place. On September 25, 2018 UN Environment and the European Commission jointly hosted an event at the United Nations HQ to launch UN Environment's Global Plastics Platform. This network will encourage new commitments to reduce plastic pollution and explore innovative ways to change the habits of design, production, consumption and disposal of plastics around the world, supporting the transition to a more circular economy.

Many countries across the world have made ambitious commitments to beat plastics pollution during 2018. On World Environment Day 2018, India announced to ban all single-use plastics by 2022. Plastic bags bans have been announced in Chile, Botswana, and Peru, while Nigeria will set up recycling plants across the country, Brazil will announce a new national plan on plastics and Wales will commit to be the first “refill nation.”

On November 15, 2018, an East Asia Summit (EAS) on combating marine plastic debris was held in Singapore. The resolution of the Summit calls for promoting awareness and research on marine plastic debris and strengthening regional and international cooperation on the question of plastic waste.

Possible solutions

First of all, all countries should move towards recycling plastic. Recycling produces environmental and economic benefits. It reduces energy consumption and the need for new material to be used while slowing the rate of resource depletion. It decreases pollution from industrial waste and limits the amount of waste sent to the landfill.

Also, reuse is one of the best ways to solve our issue. People can get creative and reuse items for secondary purposes. People also may purchase specialty items that replace single use plastics and can safely be used again and again.

It is also important to educate people on the importance of plastic recycling, as nowadays a lot of people still do not understand why it is necessary to sort trash and recycle waste.

Useful links

<https://www.greenpeace.org/international/>

<https://oceana.org/what-we-do>

<https://www.surfrider.org/>

<https://www.5gyres.org/>

<https://zerowasteeurope.eu/>

<https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/press-release/nations-commit-fight-plastic-pollution-together-during-un-general>