

BACK TO BASICS

Re-energising the Global Plastics Treaty negotiations and alternative pathways.

A CRITICAL MOMENT FOR MULTILATERAL ACTION

The Global Plastics Treaty negotiations have reached a decisive political moment.

The election of Chile's [Julio Cordano](#) as Chair of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) and the launch of a series of informal dialogues in Kyoto signal a renewed effort to rebuild trust and stalled momentum after failing to conclude negotiations in Geneva in August 2025.

These developments come against a backdrop of rising geopolitical tensions and growing fragmentation across multilateral environmental processes, but the urgency of the plastics crisis leaves little room for delay. Plastics production continues to expand rapidly while pollution accumulates across ecosystems, economies and communities.

Three years after governments agreed on [United Nations Environment Assembly \(UNEA\) Resolution 5/14](#) to negotiate a legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution, the international community faces a stark choice – either restore good-faith negotiations capable of delivering the treaty mandate or accept that alternative diplomatic pathways will need to carry the process forward.

Failure to conclude an agreement is not a neutral outcome. It would represent a political decision to allow plastic pollution to accelerate unchecked.

THE MANDATE REMAINS CLEAR

The UNEA mandate was unambiguous. Governments agreed to develop a legally binding instrument addressing the full lifecycle of plastics.

Most countries participating in the INC process have consistently demonstrated willingness to negotiate across this full mandate. The remaining divisions relate primarily to the scope and strength of obligations rather than to the existence of the problem itself.

The stalemate in Geneva reflected procedural paralysis rather than the absence of political support for a treaty. A majority of governments continue to support ambitious measures capable of meaningfully reducing plastic pollution. The task now is to ensure the process functions in a way that allows this majority to deliver the mandate agreed by the international community.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COURSE CORRECTION

The Tokyo Dialogues provided an opportunity to reset the negotiating dynamic under new leadership.

If informal intersessional dialogues are used effectively, these discussions can help clarify areas of convergence and identify political landing zones for the most contested provisions. For this effort to succeed, several principles will be essential.

First, negotiations must proceed in good faith across the entire treaty mandate. Attempts to narrow the scope of the agreement or indefinitely postpone discussions on key issues such as production, chemicals or product design would undermine the integrity of the process.

Second, procedural debates cannot continue to dominate precious negotiating time. The remaining differences are political and substantive and must be addressed directly.

Third, countries must recognise that the credibility of multilateral environmental governance is now at stake. A negotiation launched with such global consensus cannot simply collapse through procedural obstruction nor can it be hollowed out into an agreement devoid of any meaningful substance.

A TREATY MUST BE DELIVERED

The central reality facing governments is that the world – environment, people and economies – cannot afford a failed plastics treaty.

Plastic pollution is not slowing while negotiations continue. [Production is projected to increase dramatically in the coming decades, waste management systems are already overwhelmed and pollution is projected to increase tenfold.](#) Allowing negotiations to drift indefinitely would effectively lock in business-as-usual for another generation. This means that the international community must begin considering the possibility that the current negotiating structure may not be able to deliver the outcome required.

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS REMAIN AVAILABLE

If negotiations under the INC framework cannot deliver a treaty consistent with the UNEA mandate, [governments have several alternative diplomatic pathways available.](#)

These pathways are not intended to replace the INC process prematurely; rather, they provide credible options that ensure the delivery of a binding agreement if obstruction continues:

- **United Nations General Assembly.** Elevate the process to the UN General Assembly, which has the authority to clarify negotiation mandates and restore decision-making procedures where consensus rules have created paralysis
- **Basel Convention.** Negotiate a Plastics Protocol under the Basel Convention, building on the Convention's existing obligations to minimise plastic waste, with specific measures across the lifecycle of plastic addressing plastic waste generation and management
- **"Carney" Convention.** Initiate a coalition-led negotiation process, similar to the Ottawa Process that produced the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty, whereby ambitious countries move forward together to negotiate a strong agreement that others may join over time.

These approaches are not mutually exclusive and could also be combined. What matters is that progress toward a legally binding instrument continues even if one diplomatic track stalls.

A CLEAR MESSAGE TO NEGOTIATORS – DELIVER THE TREATY THE WORLD EXPECTS

The message to governments participating in informal intersessional dialogues and future INC sessions should therefore be clear – the world remains committed to delivering a global plastics treaty through the existing process.

The election of a new Chair provides an opportunity to rebuild trust and move negotiations forward. However, this commitment depends on countries participating in good faith and engaging across the full scope of the mandate agreed under UNEA. If a small number of states continues to block progress or narrows the ambition of the agreement beyond recognition, other diplomatic avenues capable of delivering the treaty the world needs must remain on the table. The negotiations on plastic pollution were launched with unprecedented global support. Governments recognised that the scale of the problem demanded collective international action And that expectation has not changed.

The question now is whether the INC process can deliver the agreement it was created to negotiate or whether countries will need to use other diplomatic routes to fulfil that mandate. What should not be in doubt is the outcome – an effective Global Plastics Treaty with measures across the full lifecycle of plastic. The responsibility now is to ensure that the negotiations produce results rather than simply more meetings.