



# **StarMUN 2025, OHCHR:**

## **Research Report on the issue of Plastic Pollution implications on the Full Enjoyment of Human Rights**

### **Introduction**

Plastic pollution is one of the most pressing environmental challenges of our time, affecting ecosystems, wildlife, and human populations around the globe. What is often overlooked is its direct and indirect impact on the enjoyment of fundamental human rights. From the right to health and clean water to the rights of Indigenous peoples and future generations, the widespread use and poor management of plastic waste pose significant threats. This paper explores the intersection of environmental degradation and human rights, the international response, and the responsibilities of states in addressing plastic pollution through a human rights lens.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

*Plastic Pollution:* The accumulation of plastic objects and particles in the Earth's environment that adversely affects wildlife, wildlife habitat, and humans.

*Microplastics:* Tiny plastic particles (less than 5mm) that result from the breakdown of larger plastic waste.

*Environmental Justice:* The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, or income with respect to environmental laws and policies.

*Right to a Healthy Environment:* The human right to live in an environment that is not harmful to health or well-being.

*Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR):* A policy approach under which producers are given significant responsibility for the treatment or disposal of post-consumer products.

### **Background Information**

Since the 1950s, more than 8 billion tons of plastic have been produced, and only a fraction has been recycled. Plastic pollution affects every corner of the world—from urban rivers to the deep ocean—and disproportionately harms vulnerable populations who live near landfills, incinerators, or polluted waterways. Chemical additives in plastics and microplastics found in drinking water and food sources raise concerns about long-term health effects. The UN has increasingly recognized the environmental crisis as a human rights concern, linking environmental degradation to core rights such as health, food, water, and dignity.

## **Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

- United States: Major producer and exporter of plastic waste.
- China: Once the largest importer of plastic waste, now limiting imports.
- India: Implementing bans on single-use plastics.
- European Union: Leading legislation on circular economy and plastic restrictions.
- UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme): Facilitates international efforts against plastic pollution.
- Basel Convention Parties: Regulating transboundary movements of hazardous waste, including plastic scrap.

## **Relevant International Agreements**

- Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal.
- Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.
- Human Rights Council Resolution 48/13 on the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.
- Ongoing UN negotiations for a Global Plastics Treaty.

## **Implications on Human Rights**

- Right to Health: Exposure to toxic chemicals in plastic affects respiratory and reproductive health.
- Right to Water: Plastic pollution contaminates freshwater sources.
- Right to Food: Microplastics disrupt aquatic ecosystems and food safety.
- Indigenous Rights: Traditional lands and livelihoods are threatened by plastic waste.
- Intergenerational Equity: Long-lasting plastic waste compromises the rights of future generations.

## **Past UN Actions**

- UNEA Resolutions on plastic pollution (e.g., UNEA 5.2 mandating global treaty negotiations).
- OHCHR reports on human rights and the environment.
- Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment recommendations.
- Human Rights Council recognition of a healthy environment as a human right.

## **Possible Solutions**

- Strengthening international legal frameworks like the Global Plastics Treaty.
- National bans and restrictions on single-use plastics.
- Promoting recycling and circular economy initiatives.
- Holding corporations accountable through EPR policies.
- Supporting affected communities with environmental justice strategies.

## **Conclusion**

Plastic pollution is not only an ecological threat - it is a human rights issue. Efforts to curb plastic use, improve waste management, and promote sustainable alternatives must be centered on protecting and fulfilling the rights of all people. At STAR MUN 2025, delegates have the opportunity to advocate for stronger, rights-based environmental governance.

## **Bibliography**

- UNEP: Legal Limits on Single-Use Plastics and Microplastics
- OHCHR: Report on Plastic Pollution and Human Rights (2021)
- Human Rights Council Resolution 48/13
- Basel Convention Plastic Amendments
- Stockholm Convention Documents
- Reports by the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment

## **Useful Links and Sources**

<https://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso>

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/fact-sheets/fact-sheet-no-2-right-work>

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/search?ln=en&cc=Voting+Data&p=Human+Rights+Council+economic+rights>

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8>

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-poverty>