Geneva/Wädenswil, 11th September 2020

OPEN LETTER

Appeal for stepping up actions for preventing plastic pollution: the need for a global treaty

Dear Member of the Swiss Parliament,

On behalf of the Gallifrey Foundation, OceanCare, the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL), and eight Swiss based organisations and networks representing a total of 350’000 members and supporters, we are writing to you to highlight the issue of plastic pollution, a transboundary problem that is increasingly affecting also our lives in Switzerland.

As plastic production continues to grow and downstream waste infrastructure is increasingly overwhelmed worldwide, we urgently require a new global architecture that addresses the full lifecycle of plastics, from the exploration of the raw materials, production and design to waste prevention and management, while ensuring coherence and coordination of activities undertaken by existing regional and international policy instruments.

As an example, a scientific study this year concluded that microplastics are present in large quantities in snow in the Swiss Alps and in the Arctic, while another report on plastic in the Swiss environment, states that around 14,000 tonnes of plastic end up in our soil and waters every year. It is increasingly clear this is not purely a marine issue and the growing number will have an increased impact on our agriculture, our pristine countryside and our lakes and rivers - as well as on human and animal health.

Now more than ever, Switzerland has the opportunity to demonstrate its global leadership on this major concern of our time. To this end, we encourage you to step up the actions and support a new global legally binding agreement to tackle plastic pollution. We invite the Swiss Government to play a central role in promoting the ambitious objective of multilateral cooperation and coordination on this issue.

We note with appreciation that Switzerland stated in its latest contribution to the Ad Hoc Open-ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics that “Given the urgency of the issue, non-action is no longer an option and the status quo is not sufficient”. In addition, the submission calls for the creation of a global architecture that includes existing and new, voluntary or potentially legally binding elements.

Firstly, although we welcome and agree, on a large part, the aspects put forward by Switzerland - which should indeed be covered by a new regime, we believe that the legal nature of the national reduction targets, as well as the industry commitments, must be binding, rather than voluntary, as Switzerland proposes.
Secondly, we encourage Switzerland to position itself as a leader by taking a proactive and constructive role, in particular by sponsoring/tabling a resolution at the upcoming fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA5) giving the mandate to negotiate a comprehensive agreement.

We hope that in your role as elected representatives by Swiss citizens, you will do your utmost for the government to act, in the first instance by giving a clear indication of the Swiss position on the points raised in this letter and more importantly, by clarifying the level of ambition Switzerland intends to promote with regards to securing a global agreement to combat plastic pollution. To that extent, we would very much welcome a request or interpellation in order to obtain the respective information from the Federal Council.

A new global agreement would focus on four pillars of action:

- Plastic Pollution Prevention, including reduction targets, national action plans, reporting and monitoring obligations, and other relevant measures;
- Coordination, ensuring that actions to address plastic pollution undertaken in other international and regional forums are complementary and coordinated;
- Technical Support, in particular technical, scientific and socio-economic assessments and knowledge exchanges; and
- Financial Support, aimed at assisting developing countries most in need with meeting their commitments and setting in place sustainably financed solutions.

We urge that UNEA5 should agree on a clear time-bound mandate to develop and negotiate a new legally binding global convention on plastic pollution.

Oceans are closely and inextricably linked to climate change, and to life on land itself. Protecting the ocean and its resources helps protect the world as a whole. The cost of inaction is huge, and it is a cost that we can no longer afford.

If you have any questions, we remain gladly at your disposal.

Yours sincerely,

Antoinette Vermilye
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Senior Attorney for the Environmental Health Program, CIEL

Fabienne McLellan
Co-Director International Relations, OceanCare
Attachment:

- Thought Starter: « Convention on Plastic Pollution: Toward a new global agreement to address plastic pollution » by EIA, CIEL, GAIA and BFFP

supported by:

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