

# Plastics: A Rights-Based Approach

## *explained*

New report from the UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights, Marcos Orellana, makes clear that **plastics pose a threat to human rights throughout the life cycle**. From extraction to production, through transport, use, and disposal, plastics are a global threat to human rights.

Plastics are toxic, and the way they are made, transported, used, disposed of, and even recycled is often dangerous to human health and safety.

*“One of the greatest constraints to plastics joining the chemical-free circular economy is the toxic chemical additives they contain.”*

Some people are especially vulnerable to the harms from plastics: Industrial workers and waste-pickers, children and future generations, women, persons of African descent, Indigenous People, coastal communities, and those living in poverty are hurt first and worst by plastics. **Protecting their rights is essential.**

### WHAT HUMAN RIGHTS ARE THREATENED BY PLASTICS?

- The right to life,
- The right to the highest attainable standard of health,
- The right to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment,
- The right to housing,
- The right to water and sanitation,
- The right to adequate food,
- The right to equality and non-discrimination,
- The right to information,
- The right to participation, and
- The right to effective remedy.

## WHAT WOULD A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO SOLVING THE PLASTICS CRISIS LOOK LIKE?

- **Access to Information:** All people need to know what's in plastics and how those additives will affect them.
- **Participation in decision-making on policy:** When policies on plastics are being made and implemented, affected people - especially Indigenous Peoples - must be part of that process.
- **Access to remedy:** If anyone is harmed by any part of the plastic life cycle, companies must be made to compensate for those harms.
- **Prevention & precaution:** Plastics have to be redesigned to reduce known or unknown harms - and potential solutions also should be assessed to make sure they uphold human rights.
- **Polluter pays:** If companies are causing harm through pollution, they should have to pay to fix it. But risks and harms should first be prevented so no rights are violated to begin with.

### WHAT CAN OUR GOVERNMENTS DO?

The report has some ideas:

- Recognize the threats to human rights from plastics.
- Adopt a rights-based approach to plastics policy,
- Reduce plastics production and consumption,
- End subsidies to plastics producers,
- Ban non-essential plastics, and
- Quickly negotiate a new global legally binding treaty on plastics.

### WHAT CAN BUSINESS DO?

The report highlights:

- Fully disclose the additives in plastic products,
- Eliminate all toxic additives,
- Stop generating hazardous emissions,
- Develop safe and circular delivery methods,
- When possible prioritize reuse systems, and
- Pay for the harms already done.

[Read more in the report](#)

See also our latest report: "[Formosa Plastics Group: A Serial Offender of Environmental and Human Rights](#)"