



Centre for Environment
Justice and Development



Swedish International
Centre for Local Democracy

PRESS CONFERENCE STATEMENT

Conference Title: Democratising Plastic Governance and Public Engagement

Mombasa, Kenya: 28/05/2025

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press,

Thank you for joining us today.

As the world prepares for the 2025 World Environment Day, next week, which will be held under the theme “Ending Plastic Pollution”, we are pleased to welcome you to this conference titled and themed “**Democratising Plastic Governance and Public Engagement**”.

The conference was a unique and timely gathering of scientists from multiple disciplines, local government officials, civil society organizations, and community-based leaders. Together, we are united by one urgent concern: the need to confront the plastic pollution crisis in a way that is **just, inclusive, and democratic**.

This Conference was opened on 26th May, by Eng. Dr. Festus Ngeno, Principal Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Forestry. The Conference was organized by the Centre for Environment Justice and Development (CEJAD) in collaboration with the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD). As we conclude this three day Conference, we would like to emphasize three key messages that are central to our collective agenda:

1. Plastics, chemicals and health

UNEA resolution 5/14, adopted in 2022 specified that the INC is to develop an international legally binding agreement based on a comprehensive approach that addresses the full lifecycle of plastic, and, among other provisions, calls for an agreement

“To promote sustainable production and consumption of plastics, including, among others, product design, and environmentally sound waste management, including through resource efficiency and circular economy approaches.”

We believe that an understanding of three principles is foundational for a Plastics Treaty that addresses the human health and climate threats from plastics throughout their lifecycle, and for promoting alternatives that truly meet the needs of a circular economy.

1. Understanding plastics as carbon and chemicals
2. Addressing the harmful health effects from chemicals in plastics
3. Recognizing that toxic chemicals make plastics incompatible with a circular economy

When people look at plastics, the physical threats are visible while the chemical threats in plastics are greater than generally understood, causing health harms and contaminating food systems. Throughout the plastics life cycle, toxic chemicals pose risks to human health and the environment, as they are released into the environment, they leech out of products during their use, are recycled into new products, or are disposed of. The impacts, especially on vulnerable populations, are global and significant (for example, the irreversible effects of endocrine disruption), warranting action at an international level.

In February, CEJAD released two studies that uncovered alarming levels of hazardous chemicals in plastic products such as children's PVC toys sold across Kenya¹ and also food chain contamination² from the disposal of plastic and other waste from hotspots such as dumpsite and incineration facilities.

Over 16,000 chemicals are added to plastics to make them functional. Thousands of these chemicals, such as brominated flame retardants, UV stabilizers, plasticisers, and the monomer bisphenol A, were found by scientists and regulators around the world to pose hazards to human health and the environment. People are exposed throughout the plastics lifecycle, from frontline communities living near production sites, to consumers, to people working in the waste sector. Recycled plastics can also be contaminated by additional chemicals.

2. A Just Transition Requires Inclusive Governance

Plastic pollution affects us all—but not equally. The burden falls most heavily on those already marginalized: waste pickers, informal recyclers, communities living near production facilities and dumpsites. As we work toward a **plastic-free future**, we must ensure that **no one is left behind**.

¹ <https://www.cejadkenya.org/resources/report/dangerous-fun-price-play>

² <https://www.cejadkenya.org/resources/report/pops-eggs-two-sites-kenya>

We call upon both **national and local governments** to meaningfully include these actors in plastic policy processes—not as afterthoughts or passive beneficiaries, but as **co-governors** of plastic governance systems. Waste pickers are not just service providers; they are innovators, organizers, and environmental stewards.

Local democracy is not only about elections; it is about everyday participation, fair decision-making, environmental accountability, and shared responsibility for sustainable development. Local governments are key actors in the global transition to a plastic-free and more equitable future—and ICLD will continue to support them in this vital work.

We further urge **researchers and development partners** to actively support this transition by facilitating inclusive spaces, generating evidence on grassroots innovations, and ensuring participatory approaches in policy design and implementation. A just transition must be collaborative, equitable, accountable and locally grounded.

3. Plastic Producers Must Be Held Accountable

The plastic crisis cannot be solved without addressing its root cause: **the production of plastic, especially single-use plastics.**

We strongly urge the **plastic industry and producers** to reduce production volumes, shift to safe and sustainable alternatives, and take full responsibility for the plastics already polluting our environment. This includes supporting the **removal of post-consumer plastic waste** and **paying for the environmental and social costs of plastic pollution.**

We underscore the urgency of implementing and enforcing **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** mechanisms. Our recent **plastic brand audit** clearly identified major plastic producers whose packaging ends up in our streets, rivers, and oceans. This data must drive accountability. EPR is not optional. It is a **moral, legal, and environmental imperative.**

We cannot afford to ignore this invisible danger. We have the data. We have science. We need to act now, to end the invisible threats of plastic pollution to our health and environment.

As the government plans to convene for the resumed session of global plastic treaty negotiations (INC 5.2), our recommendation is:

1. Elimination of production of Harmful Plastics and Additives: Advocate for eliminating toxic chemicals like phthalates, MCCPs, SCCPs, and UV stabilizers under the Global Plastics Treaty.

2. Regulating Recycling and promotion of non toxic circular economy: Prevent the reintroduction of toxic substances through recycled plastics.
3. Improving Transparency: Mandate labeling and disclosure of hazardous chemicals to enable the consumers to make informed choices.
4. Adopt Universal Safety Standards: Ensure all markets comply with strict chemical safety regulations.

In Conclusion

This conference is not just about knowledge sharing—it is about **shifting power, deepening participation, and building a future that is plastic-free, but also fair and inclusive**. We thank the media for your role in informing the public and holding institutions accountable. Together, we can democratize plastic governance—for the benefit of people, the planet, and future generations.

Thank you.

About CEJAD

Centre for Environment Justice and Development (CEJAD) is a Kenyan NGO promoting the sound management of chemicals and waste to protect human health and the environment, particularly for vulnerable populations. CEJAD is an accredited NGO to UNEP and actively advocates for eliminating toxic chemical exposure. [Website: www.cejadkenya.org]

About ICLD

The Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is a Swedish organization financed by SIDA, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, with the mission is to promote the development of sustainable local democracy in order to create opportunities for people living in poverty to influence their living conditions. www.icld.se

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