

A Short Analysis of the INC 5.2. Negotiations

Introduction

The INC 5.2 negotiations for a legally binding international treaty on plastics ended on August 15, 2025, with no agreement. Disagreement by a handful of countries on plastics production and composition, or on health considerations led to a stalemate. Even though it may appear as a failure, what has been achieved over the last three years of negotiations is a real success. Our takeaway points are:

- 120 countries are now united around the content of an ambitious treaty that covers the full life cycle of plastics,
- With revised procedure rules in a future negotiation, these countries can lead the way to an ambitious treaty,
- Environmentally Sound Management (ESM) of waste and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes on plastic waste were agreed as necessary items, but countries could not agree on making them mandatory. We hope the future negotiations can anchor ESM of waste as mandatory, as part of the full life cycle approach.

Key Political Alliances

- **Ambitious countries:** The High Ambition Coalition (HAC), comprising 76 countries, co-chaired by Norway and Rwanda, formed in 2022, advocates for a comprehensive treaty addressing the entire plastic life cycle—production, composition, consumption, and waste management. 96 countries signed the *Nice Call* last June during UNOC. The ambitious countries include most Latin American countries, island nations, Africa, the EU, Australia, and Canada, expanding to about 120 countries. These countries, however, do not all agree on the financial mechanisms.
- **Like-Minded Countries:** This bloc includes oil-producing nations, plastic producers, and their allies (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran and the other Gulf countries, Malaysia, Russia, and the U.S.). They focus solely on plastic waste management without restricting production or consumption – and with the hope of no treaty at all. China officially disassociated itself from the Like-Minded group, backing a life cycle approach to the treaty.

Procedural rules

The INC process was ruled by the need for full consensus by all countries for the treaty to be adopted, encouraging involvement from all parties but often resulting in stalemates.

Contentious Debates between Ambitious and “Like-Minded” Countries

- **Plastic Production (Art. 6):** The HAC compromised on not specifying a target, but the Like-Minded group remained steadfast against limiting production.
- **Decision-making Process (Art. 20):** The HAC and allies pushed for majority voting on post-adoption treaty changes, while the Like-Minded group defended the consensus approach.
- **Health Risks of Plastics (Art. 19):** After significant negotiations, 120 countries agreed to include health risks in the treaty, though the Like-Minded group believed the WHO should be the agency addressing it.
- **On Plastic Waste Management (Art. 8):** The mandatory nature of EPR schemes and ESM of waste standards remains disputed.