

## **Contribution of UNDESA to the Secretary-General's report on the topic of "marine debris, plastics and microplastics"**

### I. Challenges posed by marine debris, plastics and microplastics

**Agenda 21** which was adopted in 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development pointed out that "Degradation of the marine environment can result from a wide range of sources. Land-based sources contribute 70 per cent of marine pollution, while maritime transport and dumping-at-sea activities contribute 10 per cent each. The contaminants that pose the greatest threat to the marine environment are, in variable order of importance and depending on differing national or regional situations, sewage, nutrients, synthetic organic compounds, sediments, litter and plastics, metals, radionuclides, oil/hydrocarbons and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). Many of the polluting substances originating from land-based sources are of particular concern to the marine environment since they exhibit at the same time toxicity, persistence and bioaccumulation in the food chain. There is currently no global scheme to address marine pollution from land-based sources." (Chapter 17, para 17.18)

In "*The Future We Want*", the outcome document of Rio+20 held in 2012, Member States "note with concern that the health of oceans and marine biodiversity are negatively affected by marine pollution, including marine debris, especially plastic, persistent organic pollutants, heavy metals, and nitrogen-based compounds, from a number of marine and land-based sources, including shipping and land runoff." (para. 163)

### II. Actions and activities have been undertaken

In **Agenda 21**, it was agreed that "A precautionary and anticipatory rather than a reactive approach is necessary to prevent the degradation of the marine environment. This requires, *inter alia*, the adoption of precautionary measures, environmental impact assessments, clean production techniques, recycling, waste audits and minimization, construction and/or improvement of sewage treatment facilities, quality management criteria for the proper handling of hazardous substances, and a comprehensive approach to damaging impacts from air, land and water. Any management framework must include the improvement of coastal human settlements and the integrated management and development of coastal areas." (Chapter 17, para. 17.21)

**Agenda 21** also decided a series of measures to prevent, reduce and control degradation of the marine environment from sea-based activities, including addressing the degradation of the marine environment from shipping and dumping. (Chapter 17, para. 17.30)

**Agenda 21** stressed that states should, as appropriate, and in accordance with the means at their disposal and with due regard for their technical and scientific capacity and resources, make systematic observations on the state of the marine environment. (Chapter 17, para. 17.35)

In "*The Future We Want*", Member States "commit to take action to reduce the incidence and impacts of such pollution on marine ecosystems, including through the effective implementation of relevant conventions adopted in the framework of the International

Maritime Organization (IMO), and the follow up of the relevant initiatives such as the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, as well as the adoption of coordinated strategies to this end. We further commit to take action to, by 2025, based on collected scientific data, achieve significant reductions in marine debris to prevent harm to the coastal and marine environment.”(para. 163)

In “*The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*” which was adopted in September 2015, Member States agreed on Sustainable Development Goal 14 “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”, which includes the target “By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.” (A/RES/70/1, SDG 14.1)

In addition, in the fourth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) held in 1996, Member States reviewed the implementation of chapter 17 of *Agenda 21* and called for the integration of protective measures in order to address effectively the problems of adverse impacts of human activity on the atmosphere and the oceans. To this end, in particular, the Commission considered that there is a need to further strengthen coordination mechanisms between regions and subregions for better exchange of information and experience gained. The Commission emphasized the need for development and implementation of integrated coastal and marine area management plans to deal with issues relating to the coastal and marine environment. The Commission urged countries that have not yet done so to sign, ratify and implement the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping from Ships and Aircraft (London Convention) (1972) and the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (1989). The Commission also called for partnership, within specific regions, between Governments and the private sector. (E/CN.17/1996/38, decision 4/15)

In its seventh session held in 1999, CSD recommended in its decision 7/1 “Oceans and seas” particular priority be given to the prevention of pollution and degradation of the marine environment from land-based and other activities, and better scientific understanding of the oceans and seas and their resources, and of effects of pollution. The Commission invited the UN system and Governments to review their programmes to ensure that priority is given to initiate or further develop, within the context of national plans, programmes for building capacities relating to, inter alia, marine environment science, the control of activities likely to pollute or degrade the marine and coastal environment, and cooperation and coordination with other States on marine environmental matters. The Commission called for further implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, and emphasized the importance of this implementation for the prevention of the pollution and degradation of the marine environment. (E/CN.17/1999/20, decision 7/1)

### III. Further action to prevent and reduce marine debris, plastics and microplastics

- In the context of follow-up to and implementation of Agenda 2030 and SDG 14, Member States and stakeholders need to strengthen implementation of existing legal agreements, programmes, action plans and policy recommendations provided by various intergovernmental processes relating to marine environmental protection.

- Strengthen scientific research, observation, monitoring and assessment, share information and lessons learned, and build capacity in this area, and strengthen coordination between regions and subregions.
- Enhance collaboration and coordination among relevant UN organizations, funds and programmes on their actions in reducing negative impact of marine debris, plastics and microplastics to marine environment.
- Strengthen partnerships among Governments, UN system organizations and all relevant stakeholders including the private sector on this topic, following the precautionary approach.
- In the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 to be held in June 2017 in Fiji, Member States and stakeholders may further discuss and provide policy recommendations on this topic, which could be inputs to the overall review of SDGs overseen by the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF).