

Webinar Highlights

Reversing the Plastics Crisis Through a Human Rights Approach

Each stage of the plastics production cycle, from production to use and disposal, has adverse effects on health and human rights. UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights, Dr. Marcos Orellana, reports on this problem, emphasizing that **“the global plastics crisis necessitates a worldwide, human rights-based solution.”**

Featured Speaker: Dr. Orellana, UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights, speaking March 20, 2022.

This fact sheet has been created by CHE based on information presented in a CHE Alaska webinar. Selected quotes in bold are from the webinar speaker(s). For the full set of resources provided by the webinar presenters, see the [webinar page](#), where you'll also find associated Slides & Resources.

The Problem

Plastics production is expected to quadruple by 2050.

The plastics production cycle has five stages. Each of these stages negatively impacts human health in a way that violates human rights.

“Human rights are implicated in every stage of the cycle of plastics.”

1. Extraction and Refining – 99% of plastics are produced from fossil fuels.
2. Production – emits hazardous chemicals that pollute the air, water, and soil. This disproportionately impacts frontline communities living near production plants.
3. Transport – plastic products are often lost in containers at sea. **“By 2050, there will be more plastics than fish in the oceans, unless we can reverse the toxic tide of plastics.”**
4. Use – plastics expose those who use them to toxic additives. **“There are more than 10,000 chemicals that are added to plastics.”** These chemicals include **“some of the most hazardous chemicals known to humans.”**

5. Waste – less than 9% of plastics are recycled. The recycling of plastics also recycles toxic substances. **“When they are recycled, the toxic additives in the plastics are concentrated.”**

Recommendations

An effective response must be grounded in human rights.

- The right to information
- The right to participate in decision-making
- The ability to access remedies to pollution
- Prevention and precaution from harm
- The ability to hold polluters responsible

An effective response would do the following:

- Recognize the threats that plastic poses to human rights throughout its entire cycle.
- Include meaningful public participation and access to remedies.
- Adopt urgent and immediate actions to reduce the volume of plastics production and use.
- Pursue complementary international responses, including the negotiation of a new international legally binding instrument addressing the whole cycle of plastics.
- Ensure appropriate funding for international initiatives aimed at the sound management of plastics.
- Establish controls and bans on non-essential plastics.
- Invest in initiatives to train and formalize waste pickers and ensure safe and healthy work conditions.
- Require businesses to disclose the full chemical composition of plastic products.
- Ratify the Basel Convention Ban Amendment and fully implement the Basel Convention amendments relating to plastic waste.
- Phase out subsidies, export credits, and guarantees for fossil fuel extraction, plastics production facilities and plastic-to-energy projects.
- Establish and implement effective policies to manage the plastics life cycle, including by researching the risks and harms to humans and the environment from plastics.
- Establish adequate civil and criminal penalties for illegal transboundary movements of plastic waste.
- Reduce plastics production, control and eliminate toxic additives, and establish liability regimes.

- Apply the polluter-pays principle, including by adopting extended producer responsibility mechanisms within and beyond national boundaries.
- Regulate classes of chemicals in accordance with the precautionary principle.

To Find Out More

- Watch the March 20, 2022 webinar: [Reversing the Plastics Crisis Through a Human Rights Approach](#)
- Read the report to the UN: [The Stages of the Plastics Cycle and their Impacts on Human Rights](#)

About the Speaker



Dr. Marcos A. Orellana is the UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights (*full title – Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes*). He was appointed to this position in August 2020. Dr Orellana is an expert in international law and the law on human rights and the environment. His practice as legal advisor has included work with United Nations agencies, governments, Indigenous peoples, and

non-governmental organizations.

Read Dr. Orellana's full bio on the UN's website -

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Environment/SRToxicsandhumanrights/Pages/Marcos-A-Orellana.aspx>