

Plastic, people and policy: lesson 3 of 3

The global treaty

Can the world agree to end plastic pollution?



Plastic underwater. Photo: Naja Bertolt Jensen



The road so far

March 2022

The UN agrees to negotiate a legally binding treaty to end plastic pollution.

2022 to 2024

Four rounds of talks, from Uruguay to Canada.

Busan, late 2024

Talks meant to be the last end without agreement.

Geneva, August 2025

Another round ends without agreement. The chair resigns in October.

February 2026

Countries elect a new chair, Julio Cordano of Chile.

Mid-2026

Talks remain deadlocked over whether to limit plastic production.



The big disagreement

About 70 countries in a High Ambition Coalition want binding limits on how much plastic is produced. Others, including major oil and plastic producers, want the treaty to focus on waste and recycling.

Decisions are made by consensus, so any country can block agreement.

Is it better to have a weak treaty everyone signs, or a strong one only some sign?



The negotiating groups

Groups in the mock negotiation are based on real positions, simplified for the classroom.

High-ambition countries

Want a treaty that caps how much new plastic is made, and bans the most harmful products and chemicals.

Oil- and plastic-producing countries

Want the treaty to focus on waste management and recycling, not limits on production.

Coastal developing countries, including the Philippines

Suffer heavily from plastic pollution and need money and technology to manage waste.

Small island states

Receive plastic washed up from other countries, with little ability to manage it.

Industry groups (observers)

Want clear, global rules, but many oppose production limits.

Waste pickers and environmental groups (observers)

Want production cuts, fair treatment for waste workers, and no burning of waste.



The mock negotiation

1. Each group represents one bloc. Read your role card and prepare your opening statement: two minutes.
2. Round 1: every group states its position.
3. Round 2: informal talks. Try to agree wording for one treaty article on plastic production.
4. Round 3: vote by consensus. Can you agree? If not, what would it take?



Talk about it

Did your class reach consensus? Why or why not?

What compromise came closest?

What can the Philippines do while the treaty is still being negotiated?

Well done! You have finished the Plastic, people and policy lessons.



Photos and sources

Photos: underwater plastic by Naja Bertolt Jensen. All illustrations drawn for this lesson by Marine Conservation Philippines.

Sources:

- UNEP (2026). New Chair elected to lead negotiations on global plastic pollution treaty.
- IISD (2026). INC-5.3 explainer.
- Mongabay (2026). With plastic treaty in limbo, Mongabay speaks to top negotiator Julio Cordano.

Full links are in the teacher reading. Free to use and share for education. Made by Marine Conservation Philippines. More free lessons: marineconservationphilippines.org/resources/teachers-resources/

