

How did it start?

United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) [adopted a resolution on 2 March 2022](#) on ending plastic pollution by creating an international legally binding instrument. The 2022 resolution aim to complete all the negotiations by the end of 2024.

The group then brainstormed on the structure and scope of the instrument. During the discussion, it came up with an [Options Paper](#), which discusses a comprehensive approach to address the full life cycle of plastics, as mentioned in the March 2022 resolution.

The Options Paper talks in detail about the possible obligations with options for both legally binding and voluntary measures for addressing plastic pollution, including marine litter.

The Options Paper will be used as a basis for discussion during the second session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC), which is being held in Paris, France from 29 May to 2 June 2023. The first session of INC was held in Punta del Este, Uruguay from 28 November to 2 December 2022. INC is the global body that is mandated to design the international legally binding instrument on plastics.

What happened in Paris?

The March 2022 resolution was a landmark moment in the world's fight against plastic pollution. However, the detailed framework of the treaty, including its objectives, implementation and monitoring remains a work in progress. For this, the countries met in Paris to take the work of finalizing the treaty forward. They have decided to [prepare a draft text by November 2023](#), which could possibly become the Global Plastics Treaty. This draft text will explore a range of options to curb plastic pollution and will also reflect the stance of various countries on the issue.

The next round of discussions will be held in Nairobi, Kenya in November 2023.

What is India's stance on Global Plastics Treaty?

It was in [2019 when India piloted a resolution](#) on addressing single-use plastic pollution in the fourth UNEA, however, later in 2022, while discussing the binding nature of the treaty, the Indian government argued for a flexible and voluntary binding mechanism under the treaty. India was also among the countries that argued for decisions to be done by consensus, as opposed to, decisions done by the majority vote. Here the issue is: to reach decisions by consensus, is a tedious and a time taking process, resulting in a delay in discussing the core issues. India is supported by other countries like Saudi Arabia, China, Russia, Brazil.

What is influencing the meeting in Paris? Geopolitics!

As the global economy transitions away from oil, gas and coal - all considered to be dirty fuels - plastics can provide a new lease of life to fossil fuel producing companies and nations. [Research by IEA](#) suggests that petrochemicals (which are essential for producing plastics from oil) would account for more than a

third of the growth in oil demand by 2030. The oil-rich countries are playing a big role in [influencing the negotiation process](#). For example - the difference in voting for decisions (by majority or consensus) stalled the discussion for a considerable time. Also, Saudi Arabia argued for flexible and voluntary provisions for eliminating plastic waste and focussed more on promoting recycling technologies instead of limiting plastic production.

India is also aiming to become a hub for petrochemicals. The government believes that it has an immense scope for economic growth and investments. As per a [report published in Economic Times](#), the Indian petrochemical industry is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9-10% over a period of next 20 years. Giant global companies such as ARAMCO, Rosneft and ADNOC are already [exploring opportunities](#) with Indian counterparts to expand the country's production capacities for petrochemicals.

PROBLEM IN NUMBERS

- In 2019, plastics generated 1.8 billion metric tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions – 3.4% of the global total.
- Globally, 46% of plastic waste is landfilled, while 22% is mismanaged and becomes litter.
- Around 35 lakh tonnes per annum (TPA) of plastic waste was generated by India during 2019-20, out of which 50% was recycled.
- India's Per Capita plastic waste generation has almost doubled over the last five years.
- Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai and Bengaluru are top plastic waste producing cities
- In India, around 43% of manufactured plastics are used for packaging purposes and most are for single use.
- Promoting reuse options, including refillable bottles, bulk dispensers, deposit-return-schemes, packaging take-back schemes etc., can reduce 30% of plastic pollution globally by 2040.

Source: UNEP, CPCB, TERI

(Cover Image: Various types of single-use plastic items. Source: Freepik)