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**United Nations Environment Assembly of the
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2/11. Marine plastic litter and microplastics

The United Nations Environment Assembly,

Recalling the concern reflected in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled “The future we want”, that the oceans and marine biodiversity are negatively affected by marine pollution, including marine litter – especially plastic – persistent organic pollutants, heavy metals and nitrogen-based compounds, from numerous marine and land-based sources, and the commitment to reduce such pollution,

Recalling also the Manila Declaration on Furthering the Implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, which highlighted the relevance of the Honolulu Strategy and the Honolulu Commitment for the prevention and management of marine debris and called for the establishment of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter, which was subsequently launched at the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and hosted by the Global Programme of Action,

Noting the increased knowledge regarding the levels, sources, negative effects of and possible measures to reduce marine plastic debris and microplastics in the marine environment, as summarized in, among other sources, the 2016 study “Marine plastic debris and microplastics: global lessons and research to inspire action and guide policy change”, on marine plastic debris and microplastics, the preparation of which was mandated by the Environment Assembly in its resolution 1/6,

Noting also that the report of the First World Ocean Assessment points to the emerging issue of the smallest microplastic particles, which are nano-sized, and expresses concern about the ability of microplastics to enter marine food chains and the potential risk for the environment and human health,

Noting with concern that plastic and microplastics may be transported through freshwater systems such as rivers and are found in all compartments of the marine environment; that their input is rapidly increasing; that the plastics in the marine environment degrade extremely slowly; that the plastics contain and can adsorb and emit chemicals, such as persistent organic pollutants, and can contribute to their distribution and the spread of harmful organisms; and that all this has negative effects on marine life, ecosystems and ecosystem services, including fisheries, maritime transport, recreation and tourism as well as local societies and economies,

Reaffirming General Assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, by which the General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and recalling Sustainable Development Goal 14 and its target 14.1, which seeks, by 2025, to “prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution”, and recognizing the importance of other relevant Sustainable Development Goal targets, as well as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, for effective implementation,

Noting that the General Assembly in its resolution 70/235 of 23 December 2015, on oceans and the law of the sea, expressed concern regarding the negative effects of marine debris and microplastics and urged States to take action,

Recognizing the importance of cooperation between the United Nations Environment Programme and conventions and international instruments related to preventing and minimizing marine pollution from waste, including marine plastic litter, microplastics and associated chemicals and their adverse effects on human health and the environment, such as the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management,

1. *Recognizes* that the presence of plastic litter and microplastics¹ in the marine environment is a rapidly increasing serious issue of global concern that needs an urgent global response taking into account a product life-cycle approach, and acknowledging that the levels and sources of marine plastic litter and microplastics, and the resources available to tackle the issue, can vary between regions, and that measures need to be taken and adapted as appropriate to local, national and regional situations;

2. *Recalls* its resolution 1/6, “Marine plastic debris and microplastics”, and urges all States that have not yet done so to implement fully all its relevant recommendations and decisions, including through national measures and regional, international and cross-sectoral cooperation;

3. *Welcomes* the activities of the relevant United Nations bodies and organizations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the International Maritime Organization, which act in coordination with the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection and the Global Partnership on Marine Litter to prevent and reduce marine litter and microplastics; encourages the active contribution of all stakeholders to their work; and acknowledges the importance of cooperation and information sharing between the United Nations Environment Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the International Maritime Organization, as well as the cooperation under the Global Partnership on Marine Litter, on this matter;

4. *Acknowledges* the regional action plans on marine litter under the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean, the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region and the Action Plan for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Northwest Pacific Region; welcomes the ongoing development of such plans for the Black Sea, the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the Kuwait Regional Convention for Cooperation on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Pollution; welcomes the Group of Seven² action plan to combat marine litter; and urges other Governments and regions to collaborate to establish such action plans where relevant;

5. *Welcomes* the work under the aegis of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the International Whaling Commission and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals on impacts of marine debris on marine biological diversity, and under the aegis of the Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region on pollution from vessels and from land-based sources, and calls for the coordination of that work with other relevant work in the framework of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter;

6. *Also welcomes* the report³ of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme on the implementation of the Assembly’s resolution 1/6 on marine plastic debris and microplastics, takes note of the Executive Director’s recommendations, and urges that they be evaluated, and possibly implemented as relevant and appropriate, including through strengthened national, regional and international measures, cooperation and action plans, prioritizing important sources and impacts and cost-effective measures, cooperation with industry, civil society and other stakeholders to reduce the input, level and impact of plastic debris and microplastics in the oceans;

¹ Plastic particles less than 5 millimetres in diameter, including nano-sized particles.

² Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

³ UNEP/EA.2/5.

7. *Stresses* that prevention and environmentally sound management of waste are keys to long-term success in combating marine pollution, including marine plastic debris and microplastics, calls on Member States to establish and implement necessary policies, regulatory frameworks and measures consistent with the waste hierarchy, and in this context stresses the importance of providing capacity-building and that Member States should consider financial assistance to developing countries, least developed countries and in particular small island developing States for the realization of these objectives;

8. *Welcomes* the United Nations Environment Programme massive open online course on marine litter; the United Nations World Ocean Day 2016 with the theme “Healthy Oceans, Healthy Planet”; and the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, which in 2016 will focus on marine debris, plastics and microplastics, and notes, in this regard, the report of the Secretary-General prepared for the meeting;⁴

9. *Recognizes* that surface runoff, rivers and sewage outfalls are important pathways for litter transfer from land to the sea; also recognizes the need for measures to combat the littering of freshwater courses, including measures to adapt to extreme storms, flooding and other relevant effects of climate change; and encourages international cooperation on transboundary watercourses in that regard, where relevant;

10. *Also recognizes* that education, capacity-building, knowledge transfer and awareness-raising regarding sources and negative effects of and measures to reduce and prevent marine plastic debris and microplastics, as well as environmentally sound waste management systems and clean-up actions, are crucial;

11. *Requests* the Executive Director, within available resources, to assist Member States, especially developing countries, with emphasis on small island developing States and least developed countries, upon their request, in the development and implementation of national or regional measures and action plans; invites those in a position to do so to support such action; and recognizes that targeted measures in regions that are the largest sources of marine litter are especially important for the global reduction of marine plastic debris and microplastics;

12. *Recognizes* the need to identify transport and distribution pathways and hotspots of marine litter, to cooperate regionally and internationally to clean up such hotspots where appropriate, and to develop environmentally sound systems and methods for removal and sound disposal of marine litter; stresses that removal is urgent in areas where it poses an immediate threat to sensitive marine and coastal ecosystems or marine-based livelihoods or local societies; and recognizes that removal actions should, as far as possible, be risk-based and cost-effective, following best available techniques and environmental practices and the polluter pays approach;

13. *Encourages* Governments at all levels to further develop partnerships with industry and civil society and establish public-private partnerships, including with regard to environmentally friendly alternatives to plastic packaging and deposit refund systems; to raise awareness of the sources and negative effects of and possible measures for reducing marine plastic debris and microplastics; to promote change in individual and corporate behaviour; and to cooperate in the prevention and clean-up of marine plastic debris; and, in that regard, invites initiatives for the development of sustainable tourism, including through the Sustainable Tourism Programme of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns;

14. *Recognizes* the work of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and regional fisheries bodies and management organizations to mitigate and clean up abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear, and encourages Member States and Governments at all levels to include such measures in national and regional action plans to combat marine litter, as relevant, noting that cost-effective technologies and practices are available;

15. *Underlines* the need for the sharing of knowledge and experience on the best available techniques and environmental practices for reducing littering from the fishing industry and aquaculture, and for implementation of pilot projects where appropriate, including in respect of deposit schemes, voluntary agreements and recovery, in particular through prevention and, reduction, reuse and recycling (the “three Rs”);

16. *Recognizes* the role of the International Maritime Organization in mitigating marine litter; recalls annex V of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships; and agrees on the need to reduce illegal dumping of litter in the sea, including through the establishment and use of effective port reception facilities, the identification and, as appropriate, recovery of costs

⁴ A/71/74.

related to the disposal of garbage and waste, including through harbour fees, and consideration of other incentives and innovative approaches;

17. *Acknowledges* the findings of the 2016 study of the United Nations Environment Programme on marine plastic debris and microplastics⁵ on the most important global sources of and possible measures for avoiding microplastics entering the marine environment, and recognizes that Governments need to further identify the most significant sources, as well as important and cost-effective preventive measures at the national and regional levels; invites Governments to undertake such prioritized measures nationally and through regional and international cooperation and in cooperation with industry, as appropriate, and to share their experiences; and urges the phasing out of the use of primary microplastic particles in products, including, wherever possible, products such as personal care products, industrial abrasives and printing products, and their replacement with organic or mineral non-hazardous compounds;

18. *Encourages* product manufacturers and others to consider the life cycle environmental impacts of products containing microbeads and compostable polymers, including possible downstream impacts that may compromise the recycling of plastic waste; to eliminate or reduce the use of primary microplastic particles in products, including, wherever possible, products such as personal care products, industrial abrasives and printing products; to ensure that any replacement products are environmentally sound; and to cooperate in the environmentally sound management of such plastic waste;

19. *Also encourages* the establishment of harmonized international definitions and terminology concerning the size of, and compatible standards and methods for the monitoring and assessment of, marine plastic debris and microplastics, as well as the establishment of and cooperation on cost-effective monitoring, building as far as possible on ongoing related monitoring programmes and considering alternative automated and remote sensing technology where possible and relevant;

20. *Underlines* that, while research already undertaken provides sufficient evidence of the need for immediate action, more research is needed on marine plastic debris and microplastics, including associated chemicals, and especially on environmental and social impacts – including on human health – and on pathways, fluxes and fate, including fragmentation and degradation rates, in all marine compartments and especially in water bodies and sediment deposits of the coastal and open ocean, as well as on impacts on fisheries, aquaculture and economy; and urges Governments at all levels and Member States in a position to do so to support such research;

21. *Requests* the Executive Director, in close cooperation with other relevant bodies and organizations, to undertake an assessment of the effectiveness of relevant international, regional and subregional governance strategies and approaches to combat marine plastic litter and microplastics, taking into consideration the relevant international, regional and subregional regulatory frameworks and identifying possible gaps and options for addressing them, including through regional cooperation and coordination, and to present the assessment to the Environment Assembly at its next session, within available resources for this purpose;

22. *Invites* States, in cooperation with industry and other stakeholders, at the national, subregional, regional and international levels, to organize and/or participate in annual campaigns for awareness-raising, prevention and environmentally sound clean-up of marine litter, including in coastal areas and oceans, to support and supplement the civil-society-driven beach clean-up days;

23. *Invites* those in a position to do so to provide financial and other support for follow-up to the present resolution;

24. *Requests* the Executive Director to report to the Environment Assembly at its third session on progress in the implementation of the present resolution.

6th plenary meeting
27 May 2016

⁵ *Marine Plastic Debris and Microplastics: Global Lessons and Research to Inspire Action and Guide Policy Change*, UNEP, 2016.