

**UNCTAD pre-events to the 2nd part of the 5th session of the Intergovernmental
Negotiating Committee (INC-5.2), 4 August: 9:00 to 18:00**

H Building, Room H-207-208-209

Opening Remarks to the day: Ms. Luz Maria de la Mora

Good morning, Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen - and a very warm welcome to those joining us online.

1. It is a pleasure to open UNCTAD and partners' pre-events ahead of the second part of the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution.
2. These events mark the beginning of a vital chapter in our collective effort to craft a global treaty grounded in economic realities and environmental and development urgency.
3. Our focus today is on positioning trade, innovation, investment and cooperation as essential pillars in that effort – ensuring that what we design is not only ambitious, but also effective, implementable, inclusive, and informed by real-world experiences.
4. In that spirit, I am pleased to announce the release of the August 2025 edition of the Global Trade Update, which places a strong emphasis on plastics, circularity, and sustainable materials. This flagship monthly publication from our International Trade and Commodities division at UNCTAD delivers timely data and fresh analysis to support policymakers in understanding, this month the global scale of plastics trade. It examines the regulations and tariff treatments in place, highlights key services and material alternatives traded internationally, and underscores their importance to the scale and urgency of this challenge. The Update also outlines a range of policy options for consideration.

5. But numbers and policy frameworks often obscure the human dimension. Today is equally about the view from the ground – the experiences of practitioners, innovators, and regional actors who are responding to the plastic pollution challenge in real time. Their insights and experience will be essential to shaping a treaty that works in practice for all.
6. Through initiatives like our Sustainable Manufacturing and Environmental Pollution (SMEP) Programme, funded by the UK for the last 6 years, we have supported over 30 innovators, involving 700 people in more than 23 countries, working to address pollution at source in early-stage supply chains. The programme has dedicated high emphasis to address plastic pollution, and two beneficiaries, from Ghana and from Nigeria, will join us today and explain how they are innovating how plastics can be recycled and how it can be substituted in agriculture applications.
7. On the plastic substitutes side, we are supporting materials innovators, developing biodegradable ropes for seaweed farming and fishing applications, entrepreneurs developing natural textile-grade fibres from pineapple leaves and banana stems, as well as developing plastic substitution methods in agriculture, using crop residues instead of plastic mulch films.
8. We have seen how targeted technical assistance can help small enterprises and local innovators in developing and emerging economies translate policy goals into measurable impact. These are exactly the kinds of insights and experiences we hope to elevate throughout today's discussions into INC negotiations over the next 2 weeks
9. The urgency is clear. Plastics have become indispensable in the modern economy - lightweight, versatile, durable, and deeply embedded in global supply chains. But the consequences are drastic.

10. Last year, global plastic production reached 436 million metric tons. Exports alone exceeded \$1.1 trillion dollars. And yet, nearly 75% of this material becomes waste - much of it leaking into terrestrial and marine environments, overwhelming waste management systems, and crossing borders unchecked.
11. Plastic pollution is a trade and development challenge, with costs estimated at over \$1.5 trillion dollars per year, hitting hardest those countries with the least capacity to respond. We cannot solve this challenge without engaging the systems that move materials across the globe - and that means putting trade policy, investment, and technical cooperation solutions front and centre.
12. Today's pre-events do exactly that. They reflect the breadth of the plastics challenge - but also the ingenuity, cooperation, and leadership across emerging material options, and across regions and sectors.
13. We begin with a session that amplifies West African leadership and innovation. Côte d'Ivoire and its regional partners have developed a promising recycling hub proposal, introduced earlier this year at the WTO Dialogue on Plastics dedicated session on Africa.
14. The session also brings examples of practical innovation - from agricultural mulch film alternatives in Ghana to modular, renewables-powered recycling stations in Nigeria. These experiences show how localised action, when supported by the right standards, incentives and investment, can scale.
15. We then broaden the lens to regional cooperation. Plastic pollution does not respect national borders - and neither can our responses. Regional regulation along the life cycle of plastics and related trade policy alignment are proving to be powerful tools, especially when tackling avoidable single-use and harmful plastics or encouraging non-plastic substitutes and alternatives.

16. This second session explores how regional strategies can provide bottom-up lessons to reinforce the global treaty being negotiated, bridging implementation gaps and creating shared enforcement frameworks.
17. Next, we shift toward product design and material systems. As delegates well know, the treaty focuses primarily on conventional plastics - but the ripple effects on other materials are wide. Traditional and new material categories are emerging rapidly in the market, from natural biodegradable options to compostable plastics, to highly recyclable durable, and reusable plastics. But without clear regulations standards and detailed trade classifications on plastics, non-plastic substitutes and consequential wastes, we risk creating new challenges while solving others.
18. This third session addresses these trade-offs and regulatory challenges, especially in markets that lack comprehensive collection, advanced sorting, industrial composting or sophisticated recycling systems. As WTO members and the World Customs Organisation work toward the next revision of the Harmonised System, we must ensure that our trade rules support - not hinder - a circular economy.
19. Finally, we close the day with a session hosted by UNCTAD and the Forum on Trade, environment and sustainable development (TESS), focused on trade as an engine for implementation. Trade-related policies, data systems, and services will be essential in delivering treaty outcomes. Better customs data, mutual recognition of standards and services providers investment flows, and clear consumer information can support a just transition - one that empowers countries to move from pollution to prevention, and from extraction and disposal to circularity.
20. These sessions are also deeply linked to wider global efforts. The WTO Dialogue on Plastics continues to offer technical substance and political support to these discussions. The UN Ocean Conference and UN Ocean Forum also reinforced the

importance of addressing plastics as a threat to marine ecosystems and related sectors such as fisheries, transport and tourism. Similarly, the United Nations guidelines for consumer protection (adopted in 1985, revised 1999 and 2015) provide important elements to safeguard consumers from greenwashing and mislabelled plastics.

21. The Finance for Development process reminds us that effective implementation must be resourced, especially in developing and small island States. Our own work through the SMEP, Oceans, and BioTrade Programmes reinforces this – showing how tailored technical assistance can unlock real solutions in the markets that need them most.

22. Looking ahead, the insights we generate here will resonate far beyond Geneva. They will feed into the outcomes of UNCTAD-16 later this year, and shape positions at COP30 in Brazil - as plastic pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss converge as part of the triple planetary crisis.

23. Colleagues, today's agenda is full - not just in content, but in potential. These are not side conversations. They are core building blocks of a treaty that must be grounded in the realities of trade, production, investment and daily life of real people.

24. I invite all of you - here in Geneva and online - to approach today's pre-events with ambition, curiosity, and openness. Because the treaty we are working toward cannot succeed without the perspectives, evidence, and partnerships that emerge from spaces like this one.

25. Thank you, and I wish you a rich and productive day.