



# PLASTIC IS FOREVER

A book featuring the finalist entries from the  
Plastic Waste Partnership photography competition

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The Plastic is Forever photography book has been approved by the working group of the Plastic Waste Partnership of the Basel Convention. It is intended to assist authorities, stakeholders, and the public to manage plastic wastes in an environmentally sound manner. It does not necessarily represent the viewpoints of the working group members on all the details of its content. The book cannot be understood as derogating to the text of the Basel Convention and any decision adopted by the Conference of the Parties, and is without prejudice to the views of individual Parties and the Conference of the Parties. The information presented therein is current at the time of publication. The working group reserves the right to revise this content at any given time.

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**PLASTIC IS FOREVER**  
**SO IT'S GET CLEVER ABOUT**  
**TIME TO MANAGING IT!**



## PREFACE

As I write, droughts are causing water levels to drop across Europe's rivers and lakes, revealing artefacts from the past. What would be unearthed from our civilization should something similar occur in the future? More than anything, plastic.

Intended to be versatile and durable material, plastic has caused a global pollution crisis. Eleven million metric tonnes of plastic enter the oceans every year. Microplastics have also been detected in the Himalayas and the Arctic. Plastic waste is suffocating flora and fauna. Human food is being contaminated with plastic and plastic additives. Plastic pollution drives climate change, as fossil fuel is plastic's primary source. The way we produce, use and dispose of plastics is clearly a strong driver of the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste.

Over the past few years, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has been promoting a systemic transformation to a circular economy – one that keeps plastics in the economy instead of dumping it in the environment. In 2022, Member States delivered a major landmark when they agreed to develop an international legally binding agreement to end plastic pollution – an agreement that should address the full lifecycle of plastic, including its design, production, consumption and end-of-life management.

An Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee is now working on the instrument, with the objective of setting up the agreement by 2024. Multilateral Environmental Agreements, like the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, have a crucial role to play in this process. The Basel Convention, in particular, has already paved the way for decisive action to address plastic pollution. The Convention's 190 Parties are already legally bound to minimize plastic waste and its hazardous constituents, strictly control transboundary movement, and ensure environmentally sound waste management.

Outreach initiatives like the *Plastic is Forever* photography competition and this book serve as an excellent vehicle to inspire further action on plastics – through the upcoming deal and through individual and collective action in the meantime. Plastic pollution affects us all. We must all do our part to end it.



**Inger Andersen,**  
UN Under-Secretary-General  
and Executive Director,  
United Nations Environment  
Programme

## FOREWORD

Growing up in the Seychelles instilled in me a deep sense of understanding and love of the natural world. I soon came to realize that living in harmony with nature hinges on understanding and respecting the needs of humans and ecosystems alike, something that we, unfortunately, haven't been very good at doing.

Plastic pollution is a case in point when it comes to the exigency for balance. Over the last decades, we have come to depend on plastic for myriads of tasks, but seem unable to manage it. As a result, more and more plastic is being produced, most of it discarded after a single use. Very little ends up being recycled in environmentally sustainable ways. Instead, plastic is typically left to sip into the soil, and get carried away by sea and air, breaking down into smaller micro and nano particles, which are rapidly putting our planet in a chokehold.

The plastic pollution crisis is a real and present danger that feeds into biodiversity loss and climate change. But the international community is facing it head-on.

The work of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions rests on a balance point of enabling government representatives, science experts, civil society and the private sector to protect human health and the environment from hazardous chemicals and wastes. To that end, the Basel Convention was strengthened through the Plastic Waste Amendments and establishment of the Plastic Waste Partnership, which inform the work of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee mandated to develop a global legally binding treaty to end plastic pollution.

The Plastic is Forever international campaign raises awareness of how crucial plastic waste management is and of the tools available to tackle it. This photography book is one of the campaign's byproducts, showcasing the finalist entries of the Plastic Waste Partnership photo competition.

I would like to thank all the people from around the world who stepped up to participate in the competition and share what plastic pollution means to them. I believe that these photos perfectly illustrate that plastic waste never really goes away when you throw it; it just comes around. It is my sincere hope that the book will challenge your worldview, inform, and ultimately inspire you to be a more conscientious citizen.



**Rolph Payet,**  
Executive Secretary  
of the Basel, Rotterdam  
and Stockholm  
Conventions

## THE STATE OF PLASTIC IN TODAY'S WORLD

Plastic is a durable material with an almost infinite life cycle. When it decomposes, it breaks down into micro and nanoplastics, which can sip into the soil, and get carried across vast distances by air and water. That's how we reached the point of finding plastic particles from the highest peaks of the Himalayas to the deepest trenches of the Pacific.

Many of these particles contain toxic plastics additives that can cause cancer, damage immune and reproductive systems, and impair intellectual functions. And all of them cause degradation to land and marine ecosystems.

It is estimated that humans breathe approximately 100,000 microplastics each year.<sup>1</sup> We also eat and drink them. In 2018, an Orb Media study uncovered that 83% of tap water and 90% of bottled water contained plastic particles.<sup>2</sup> The average person is ingesting five grams of microplastics every week – the equivalent of a credit card.<sup>3</sup>

Plastic is a **durable material** with an almost **infinite life cycle**.

<sup>1</sup> Environ. Sci. Technol. 2019, 53, 12, 7068–7074  
<https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.est.9b01517>

<sup>2</sup> Graham Readfearn. WHO launches health review after microplastics found in 90% of bottled water. The Guardian.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/mar/15/microplastics-found-in-more-than-90-of-bottled-water-study-says>

<sup>3</sup> World Wide Fund for Nature, Dalberg Advisors, The University of Newcastle. No plastic in nature: assessing plastic ingestion from nature to people. World Wide Fund for Nature. 2019.

The average person is ingesting **five grams of microplastics every week** – the equivalent of a credit card.

We are even born with them, as revealed in a 2021 study that detected microplastics in human placentas.<sup>4</sup>

However, without plastics we wouldn't be as safe: IV bags, syringes, surgical masks, prosthetic limbs, motorcycle helmets, and so many other life-saving objects are made of plastic materials. We would waste more food: plastic packaging prolongs the life of meat and vegetables. We would spend more money: plastic is affordable, versatile and reusable.

Plastic is an enduring human invention that has numerous applications in modern society. Plastic waste, however, needs to be minimized and managed responsibly to prevent adverse effects on human health and the environment.

Plastic waste, however, needs to be **minimized** and managed responsibly to **prevent adverse effects** on human health and the environment.

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Ragusa, Alessandro Svelato, Criselda Santacroce, Piera Catalano, Valentina Notarstefano, Oliana Carnevali, Fabrizio Papa, Mauro Ciro Antonio Rongioletti, Federico Baiocco, Simonetta Draghi, Elisabetta D'Amore, Denise Rinaldo, Maria Matta, Elisabetta Giorgini. Plasticenta: First evidence of microplastics in human placenta. Environment International. Volume 146, 2021.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2020.106274>

# THE BASEL, ROTTERDAM AND STOCKHOLM CONVENTIONS

The **Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions** are the three leading multilateral environmental agreements that share the common objective of protecting human health and the environment from hazardous chemicals and wastes:

The **Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal**, which was adopted in 1989 and numbers 190 Parties as of November 2022, aims to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of the inappropriate management of hazardous wastes and other wastes worldwide.

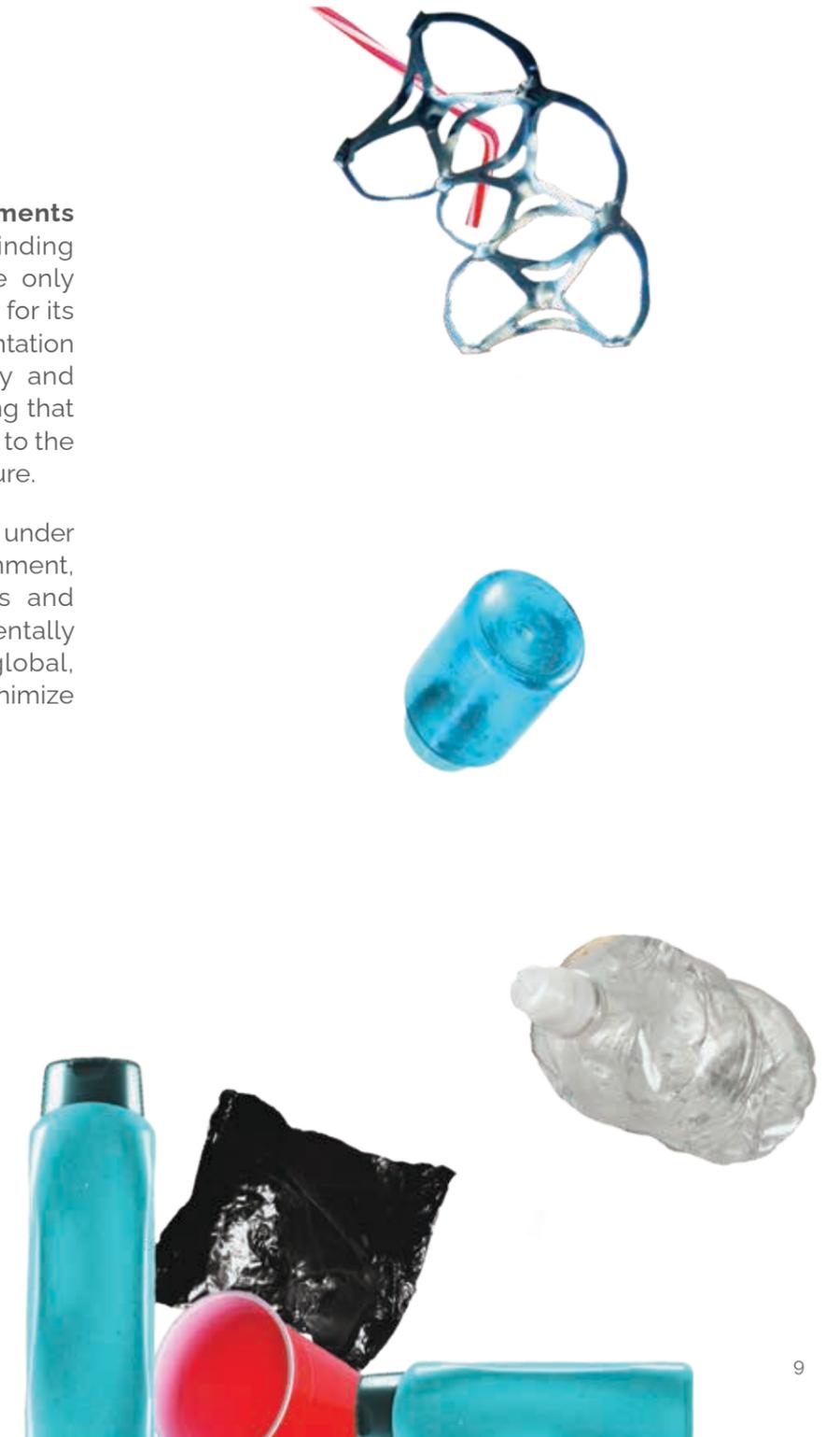
The **Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade**, which was adopted in 1998 and numbers 165 Parties as of November 2022, provides countries with a first line of defense against hazardous chemicals by facilitating information exchange about their characteristics, by providing for a national decision-making process on their import and export, and by disseminating these decisions to Parties.

The **Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants**, which was adopted in 2001 and numbers 185 Parties as of November 2022, aims to protect human health and the environment from highly dangerous, long-lasting chemicals by restricting and ultimately eliminating their production, use, trade, release and storage.



The Basel Convention **Plastic Waste Amendments** came into effect on 1 January 2021, legally binding Basel Convention Parties to trade plastic waste only among consenting countries that possess facilities for its environmentally sound management. The implementation of the Amendments brings clarity, transparency and accountability in the plastic waste trade by ensuring that the export of many types of plastic waste is subject to the Basel Convention's Prior Informed Consent procedure.

The **Plastic Waste Partnership** has been established under the Basel Convention to mobilise business, government, academic and civil society resources, interests and expertise to improve and promote the environmentally sound management of plastic waste at the global, regional and national levels and to prevent and minimize its generation.



# PLASTIC IS FOREVER PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

The Plastic Waste Partnership invited people from around the world to share photographs that show how the plastic waste crisis is impacting on daily lives. The photography competition forms part of the Plastic is Forever campaign that uses public outreach to inform people of the ways that the United Nations is fighting plastics pollution.

Entries were judged on presentation, composition and technical quality by a designated panel, and the finalists were displayed in an open-air exhibition in Geneva, Switzerland, as well as in a digital exhibition hosted by UN Exhibits. The winners in the three categories of professional photographer, amateur photographer, and under 18-years-old photographer were announced during the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions Plastics Forum, which was convened in the margins of the June 2022 meetings of the conferences of the Parties to the BRS Conventions (2021/2022 BRS COPs).



## PANEL

### **Oswaldo-Patricio Alvarez-Perez**

President

Fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention

### **Jewel Batchasingh**

Director

Basel Convention Regional Centre for Training and Technology Transfer - Caribbean

### **Sara Hylton**

Photographer, Explorer

National Geographic

### **Ingeborg Mork-Knutson**

Head of Section - Pollution Control and Decommissioning

Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment

### **Rolph Payet**

Executive Secretary

Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions

### **Paul Rose**

Expedition Leader, Broadcaster

National Geographic, United Nations



**WINNER:**  
**PROFESSIONALS**  
**CATEGORY**

*Manta Ray Plastic Soup*  
Vincent Kneefel, the Netherlands

Being an underwater photographer, manta rays are one of my favourite species to encounter. They are highly intelligent, social creatures, super-curious and playful in nature. They have the largest brain-to-size ratio of any fish and can recognize themselves in the mirror, an ability indicative of high cognitive function, also shown by dolphins, primates and elephants.

In 2019, I was visiting Nusa Penida in Indonesia where manta rays gather to get their regular hygiene check by small cleaner wrasse. When feeding, manta rays swim with their mouths wide open, drawing in zooplankton and krill. I watched as a massive amount of plastic started to drift into their feeding area. It was heartbreaking to see these magnificent animals with plastic bags around their mouths and bodies...



**WINNER:**  
**AMATEURS CATEGORY**

*A Woman Scavenges for Survival in a Mountain of Plastic Waste*

Sufyan Arshad, Pakistan

In the city of Bahauddin Punjab, I encountered a single mother of three collecting and grading plastic bottles to sell them to a recycling factory. When a person lives below the poverty line, their primary concern is to survive. Things like plastic pollution don't really factor in, and instead they become a means to an end. Among other things, the photo shows the interlinkages between poverty and pollution.



**WINNER:**  
**UNDER 18 CATEGORY**

*Morning Spotlight at Anse Royale Church*  
Sienna Goldstein, Seychelles

The day I took the photograph, I was quite cranky because my mother had woken me up early. As I was walking down the street, we came across a bin that had been thrown down, plastic spilling all around it. I snapped the photo realizing that plastic waste can be found even in the most serene places.

*Plastic Monster*  
Céline Bellanger, France



*Plastic Sunset*  
Paula Porobija, Croatia



*Survival*  
Jophel Botero Ybioso, Philippines



*Plastic Waste Scavenger*  
Muntaka Chasant, Ghana





*Up-close and in Plastic*  
Mauricio Ruiz, Uruguay

*129-year-old Humanitarian Vessel Sails Through Plastic Waste in the Java Sea*  
Margarete Macoun, Germany



*Chelonia Mydas Comes Up for  
a Breathe Amongst Debris*  
Heidi Acampora, Brazil





*Aerial View of Ghana's Korle Lagoon*  
Muntaka Chasant, Ghana



*Live with the Environment*  
Muhammad Amdad Hossain, Bangladesh



*Indonesian Beach on Fire*  
Vincent Kneefel, the Netherlands

*Reality Check*  
Anita Bubalo, Croatia





*Sightings on a Beach Walk in Italy*  
Alexandra Rudiak, Germany/Canada

*Two Boys*  
James Wakibia, Kenya





*Crying Girl Beside a House*  
Fakir Mohamad bin Md. Nor, Malaysia

*Falling Asleep*  
Muhammad Amdad Hossain, Bangladesh





*Nature Message in a Bottle*  
Jurgita Šukienė, Lithuania



*Drowning in Plastic*  
Sophie Dingwall, United Kingdom

*Ghost Jelly in Indonesia*  
Shannon Switzer Swanson, United States  
of America



*Plastic River*  
Shahriar Hossain, Bangladesh





*Choose Reusables: Our Children's Fight*  
Jacqueline Elbing-Omania, Germany/United States of America

*Bon Appétit*  
Goran Dorić, Croatia



*The Plastic in our River*  
Fully Syafi Handoko, Indonesia





*Plastic Instead of Leaves*  
Fakhrizal Setiawan, Indonesia



*Shame*  
Đurđica Milosavljević, Croatia

*Cultivating Plastic*  
Paul Elias, Tanzania





