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After Adjournment to a Future Meeting, U.S. Cements its Obstructionist Record by Blocking Civil Society Organizations from Speaking in the Closing Plenary of Plastics Treaty Negotiations

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On the last day of the latest Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-5.2) for a global agreement to end plastic pollution, with 40 minutes notice, the Chair called for the final plenary to begin at 5:30 am. After nearly four hours of Member State interventions that advanced no clear path forward, the Chair announced that observers (Indigenous Peoples, other rights holders, and civil society) would be given an opportunity to speak.

The United States, silent for the entire time the floor was open for Member State interventions, raised its placard and suggested that the Chair adjourn the session, immediately before the Indigenous Peoples and other rights holders and stakeholders were given the opportunity to intervene per the Chair's directive just a few minutes prior. Kuwait also asked the Chair to end the session as a matter of preserving delegates'

health. Following these two interventions the Chair did gavel the plenary to a close to be continued at an unnamed time and place in the future.

“It is noteworthy that, while the United States continues to pull out of most multilateral policymaking spaces, they are here in Geneva putting such a heavy thumb on the scales of these negotiations, joining other industry-backed, no-ambition countries who are rejecting critical articles on production and chemicals of concern, while persistently undermining the mandate of UNEA resolution 5/14,” **said Graham Hamilton, Acting U.S. & Canada Regional Coordinator at Break Free From Plastic.**

For nearly two weeks the Chair had engaged in clandestine, insider negotiating to produce multiple rounds of low ambition, non-binding treaty language that failed to address the most important issues in the treaty and would not come close to meeting the mandate set out by UNEA resolution 5/14. Despite these consistent barriers from UNEP, reinforced by the like-minded group and the U.S., the sustained pressure from Civil Society Organizations (CSO) and a majority of ambitious Member State allies ultimately resulted in the rejection of the Chair’s problematic texts, and, after an exhausting 24 hours of negotiating, the committee adjourned without clear agreement on a path forward.

“The U.S. and its unambitious allies continue to silence the voices of the most impacted communities, including Indigenous, front and fenceline communities and waste pickers around the world”, said **Frankie Orona, Executive Director of the Society of Native Nations.** “Plastic pollution is not just an environmental issue, it is a human rights crisis. Our best option now is to move forward with an INC-5.3 to continue the negotiations and fight for a treaty that truly safeguards people and the planet.”

While it is disappointing that after another expensive and time consuming round of negotiations we still don’t have a text that is strong enough to serve as the basis for a treaty that adequately addresses plastic pollution across the full lifecycle, the fact that CSOs held the line with the support of a majority of members states represents a victory for all global movements working to safeguard our environment, public health, and human rights.

“The United States and its petrostate allies have undermined the courage and ambition displayed by a majority of countries, weakened the treaty on behalf of the petrochemical industry, and pushed these negotiations to the brink of total failure,” said **Sarah Martik, Executive Director of the Center for Coalfield Justice**. “But frontline communities like ours are what have been driving and keeping ambition in these talks alive since INC-1 and we will continue to call for a treaty that cuts production, protects us from harmful chemicals, and ensures a just transition for our communities.”

For the time being, it remains unclear when or where the talks will resume. Until then, the Break Free From Plastic movement will celebrate the fact that a civil society united once again to hold the line and prevent a meaningless instrument from being adopted. “The U.S. and the petrochemical industry continue to devalue our lives,” said **John Beard, Jr., President of Port Arthur Community Action Network (PACAN).** “We’ve been locked out of meetings and debates on substantive issues as they continue to try and mute our voices. But we refuse to be sacrificed any further. The global majority is behind us and we’re not going anywhere.”

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About BFFP *— #BreakFreeFromPlastic is a global movement envisioning a future free from plastic pollution. Since its launch in 2016, more than 2,700 organizations and 11,000 individual supporters from across the world have joined the movement to demand massive reductions in single-use plastics and push for lasting solutions to the plastic pollution crisis. BFFP member organizations and individuals share the values of environmental protection and social justice and work together through a holistic approach to bring about systemic change. This means tackling plastic pollution across the whole plastics value chain – from extraction to disposal – focusing on prevention rather than cure and providing effective solutions. www.breakfreefromplastic.org.*