

Chris Bostic at the first Intergovernmental Negotiating Conference of the **United Nations treaty to end plastics pollution** (Punta del Este, Uruguay 2022):

Thank you this important forum and for allowing us this opportunity. My name is Chris Bostic, and I represent Action on Smoking and Health, or ASH, the world's oldest organization dedicated to ending the harm caused by tobacco. ASH is also a member of the global Stop Tobacco Pollution Alliance, a coalition of tobacco control organizations created to participate in these negotiations.

I want to make two specific points that I believe are important for framing our future collective work.

The first is to echo what has been said by many delegations and members of civil society: not all plastics are the same. They vary in several dimensions. Some are more problematic than others; some are more toxic than others; some are less necessary than others; and some are single-use. Some plastics should be regulated, and some should be banned immediately.

A singular example of the latter is cigarette "filters." I emphasize that the word filter does not have the same meaning as other filters we have and will discuss in this process, as it implies that they filter some of the harms out of cigarettes. To be clear, they do not. Cigarette filters are made of plastic, and the release of tiny plastic particles during the act of smoking causes additional harm. They make cigarettes more deadly, not less. Cigarette filters are wholly unnecessary.

Once cigarettes are smoked, the filters become cigarette butts, which are full of toxins and carcinogens. A small cigarette butt may seem like a little thing, but one butt dropped into a goldfish bowl will kill the goldfish. Filters are extremely toxic.

Cigarette filters are the most littered item on earth. Approximately 4.5 trillion filters – yes, trillion – are discarded into the environment each year. As you walk down the street tonight, or on the beach, look down. You will see them everywhere.

Other forms of plastic are also problematic, toxic and unnecessary. They should all be banned, and we should spend our time discussing more difficult topics.

My second point is this: just as not all plastics are the same, not all stakeholders are the same. I urge delegations to account for inherent conflicts of interest as they weigh input from observers. To return to tobacco as an example, the tobacco industry is excluded from participating in the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control because of the inherent conflict between their interests and the interests of public health. Not all conflicts of interest are as stark, but I urge you to consider those conflicts. The emphasis on inclusivity is laudable, but the problem we address is too severe to worry about ensuring continuing corporate profits. The overall good of society – environmental, health, human rights, and yes, economic – should be our overriding goal.

Thank you, and best of luck as you move forward. The world is depending on you.