

14. Proposing and Signing a Declaration

Karen Bullock

In March 2022, the UN Environment Assembly voted to develop a Global Plastics Treaty. Its goals are to reduce plastic pollution across the entire plastic lifecycle and safeguard human health. An Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee met several times to draft the treaty with a fifth meeting convened in the Republic of Korea in late November 2024.

The “Minderoo-Monaco Commission on Plastics and Human Health” wished to make a strong statement in advance of the Korea meeting calling for a Global Plastics Treaty that would include two key provisions: a mandatory, legally-binding global cap on the production of new plastics, and comprehensive regulation of the thousands of chemicals in plastics. The Commission considers these provisions essential for protecting human health and advancing social justice. The Commission recommended additionally that the Treaty should include restrictions on single-use plastics.

To set its conclusions and recommendations in a humanistic context, the Minderoo-Monaco Commission made the decision to convene an international conference in the run-up to the Korea meeting to examine the plastics crisis through the lenses of ethics and morality. The Commission chose to convene this conference at Boston College because a unique and distinctive aspect of Boston College’s program for Global Public Health and the Common Good is its strong focus on the ethical and legal foundations of global public health.

This emphasis reflects our foundation at Boston College in the Jesuit, Catholic tradition of service to others and our commitment to a preferential option for the poor. We stand with and for those whose voices are often the last to be heard, if heard at all. In the times of need, to confront global public health challenges such as plastics pollution, which

disproportionately impact marginalized individuals and low-resourced communities, our collective action is paramount.

A key goal of the 2024 Boston College conference “Joining Science and Theology to End Plastic Pollution, Protect Health, and Advance Social Justice” was to produce a Declaration at the conference conclusion that speaks to the moral and ethical dimension of the plastics crisis. This Declaration is based on the recognition that the global plastics crisis is more than an environmental crisis and more than a threat to health. It is also an ethical crisis—an affront to human dignity. Accordingly, the Declaration urges the UN negotiators to incorporate provisions into the Treaty that are explicitly designed to advance human rights and protect the world’s poorest people against plastic’s threats to health. The Declaration concludes with the following words:

Continuing unchecked, increases in plastic production are unethical and immoral. They threaten all life on earth. Those who advocate for unchecked growth in plastics must re-examine their behavior, embrace the reality that the earth is a shared inheritance—a gift from the Creator, and work toward a more equitable and sustainable future. All of us have a shared responsibility to be good stewards of God’s creation.



Karen Bullock, PhD, LICSW, FGSA, APHSW-C, is the Louise McMahon Ahearn Endowed Professor in the Boston College School of Social Work and in the program Global Public Health and the Common Good. She is a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Work (LICSW) with mental health practice experience and expertise in health disparities, health equity, serious illness care, aging and gerontology, hospice, palliative and end-of-life care decision making. She has served as Principal Investigator and/or Co-Investigator for over \$5 million in federal grant funding focused on equity and inclusion for workforce development, aging, and health network sustainability. Dr. Bullock is a John A. Hartford Faculty

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Scholar and has served on several national boards and committees, including the Social Work Hospice and Palliative Care Network (SWHPN) as vice-chair and the American Cancer Society (ACS) Oncology Social Work Research Peer Review Committee, past chair. She is a member of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) Roundtable on Quality Care for People with Serious Illness, a board member of the Palliative Care Quality Collaborative (PCQ), Steering Committee member for the Duke University REACH Equity Center, affiliate faculty at the Center to Advance Palliative Care (CAPC), and has an appointment in the Department of Psychosocial Oncology and Palliative Care at Dana Farber Cancer Institute (DFCI).