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Press Release

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Assemblymember Cristina Garcia, Ten Legislative Co-Sponsors, and a Broad Coalition Call for The Biden Administration, as a Matter of Global Urgency, to Make Ratification of the Basel Convention Priority in the First 100-days

AJR 4 calls ratification of the Basel Agreement a critical step in properly regulating international environmental injustice of plastic dumping on countries without currently having the capacity to properly manage the material.

(Sacramento) – Today, Assemblymember Cristina Garcia (D-Bell Gardens) introduced AJR 4 urging the Biden Administration to act immediately to ratify the Basel Convention, which addresses the growing global concern of plastic pollution and its severe environmental impacts.

“All the scientific data shows that plastic waste poses an existential threat to our planet equivalent to climate change. My resolution calls for the Biden administration to prioritize responsible management of plastic waste with a real sense of urgency. The coming administration’s clearest path to that ends is to ratify the Basel Agreement as a first 100-days priority.” urged Assemblymember Garcia.

The Basel Convention resolution on the Control of the Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (1989) was signed but never ratified by the United States. The United States is now one of only a few countries that have failed to ratify this vital multinational environmental agreement to protect developing countries from the export and dumping of wastes from rich industrialized countries. According to the journal [Science Advances](#) the United States and Great Britain are the world’s biggest source of plastic waste.

In 2019, the Basel Convention was amended to include mixed and contaminated plastic waste shipments within its control procedure to address the problem of plastic waste collected for recycling in industrialized nations and sent to highly polluting recycling operations in developing countries. In these locations, the plastic waste is often dumped and burned rather than safely recycled.

As of January 1, 2021, such exports will require the notification and consent of receiving countries prior to export. However, the United States, not being a Basel Party will not be able to legally export wastes, which are illegal for the importing country to receive, leading to illegal traffic, seizures, lawsuits, and waste repatriation events. Plastic pollution is a growing global concern.

“Right now, floating in the Pacific Ocean is a [patch of plastic trash](#) twice the size of the state of Texas. The effects of that plastic patch negatively impact ocean life and island and mainland communities from Japan, to the Philippines, to Australia, to Peru, to the United States—no one is spared. That’s the chilling reality of the state of plastics management on our planet. Ratifying the Basel Agreement will show the United States takes responsibility for our role in this crisis and that we are willing to work toward solutions,” concluded Assembly member Garcia.

Quotes from co-authors and sponsors

Senator Henry Stern (D-Los Angeles) Co-Author AJR 4

“The U.S. really needs to ‘walk the walk’ when it comes to plastics, because ‘recycling plastic’ doesn’t mean shipping it to poorer, underdeveloped countries for it to be burned. The U.S. doesn’t just need to ratify the Basel Convention and do a better job of recycling, it needs to stop producing so much of the stuff in the first place.”

Senator Bob Wieckowski (D-Fremont) Co-Author AJR 4

“I successfully authored a resolution on the Basel Convention in 2019, but unfortunately Congress did not act. Now that more environmentally aware leaders are serving in Congress, and soon the White House, it is time again to urge ratification to reduce international pollution, including global plastic waste.”

Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez (D-Chula Vista)

“We have to be honest with ourselves: single-use plastics do not decompose, and simply dumping them onto other countries does not cause them to be recycled.” Assemblywoman Gonzalez said. “If we don’t act responsibly now, the plastic pollution crisis will continue to cause irreparable harm to our ecosystem and communities.”

Los Angeles County Supervisor Hilda Solis

“For too long, we have relied on exporting plastic waste to countries where large portions of the waste stream were disposed improperly,” said Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Chair Hilda L. Solis, Supervisor to the First District. “Plastic waste is rapidly becoming one of the largest global threats to our environment, and in response nearly every country has signed on to the Basel Convention to stem the tide of plastic pollution. It is vitally important that our state and nation join efforts from around the world to curb illegal exports of plastic waste, and develop the technologies and infrastructure needed to recover plastic here at home.”

Heidi Sanborn, Chair, [Commission on Recycling Markets and Curbside Recycling](#).

“The California [Commission on Recycling Markets and Curbside Recycling](#) is comprised of 17 people representing a variety of stakeholders which unanimously supported policy recommendation #10 in our report to the Legislature delivered just last month which states “California should encourage Federal action on Basel Convention Ratification”. It is encouraging to know that the many volunteer hours the Commission worked over the last six months to advise the legislature and CalEPA is being taken seriously and leaders are acting on our recommendations”.

Jim Puckett, Founder and Director of the Basel Action Network.

For too long we Americans have been using developing countries as convenient dumping grounds for our wastes -- even when these exports violate their laws and end up causing serious harm to their health and environment. This occurs because we are the only developed country in the world that has to date refused to

ratify the Basel Convention – a treaty requiring global environmental justice in waste management. We applaud this resolution as the first step which will lead us to finally ratify this essential global agreement.

Genevieve Abedon, on behalf of the Clean Seas Lobbying Coalition

“Plastic is hazardous to the health of communities, ecosystems and our climate from the extraction of fossil fuels all the way through disposal of waste. Particularly with California being the largest exporter of plastic waste in the country, the Clean Seas Lobbying Coalition enthusiastically supports the Joint Resolution in favor of the United States' ratification of the Basel Convention and its 2019 Plastic Waste Amendment.”

John Davis, Mojave Desert and Mountain Joint Powers Authority

"The Basel export limitations reemphasize the need to create and strengthen our own markets if we are to recycle plastic. Plastic manufacturers need to take the burden off California ratepayers and build viable markets here to improve their woeful recycling performance. We need real solutions now, not more promises.

Eric Potashner, Vice President and Senior Director of Strategic Affairs, Recology

“Recology strongly supports AJR 4. In December, we sent a letter to the incoming Biden Administration to urge the President-Elect to lead by joining the Basel Convention and ratifying the Plastics Waste Amendments. We cannot continue to burden the most vulnerable communities on the planet with our plastic pollution. To that end Recology has committed to no longer export low-grade plastic materials (Mixed Rigid Plastics and Mixed Plastics #3-7) received after January 1 of this year.”

Dan Jacobson, Senior Advisor Environment California

"It is time for the United States and California to stop shipping our toxic waste to other countries and figure out ways to deal with it. We should be reducing what we produce in the first place and managing what is left. Passing the buck is wrong."

Ashley Blacow-Draeger, Pacific Policy and Communications Manager, Oceana

Globally, 33 billion pounds of plastic enter the marine environment every year and is devastating the world's oceans. Single-use plastic is made from a material that is designed to last forever, but often used for a moment and then discarded. With a mere nine percent of all plastic waste generated ever being recycled, that alone is not enough to solve the plastics crisis. As the top producer of plastic waste, the United States has the responsibility to reduce the amount of unnecessary single-use plastic generated for the betterment of environmental health and public health both here at home and abroad. Oceana thanks Assemblymember Garcia for introducing this resolution for the United States to join the Basel Convention and properly address our own plastic waste problems instead of shipping our crisis off to other countries. Paramount to achieving this reduction in plastic throwaway waste at home is for consumer goods companies to step up to the plate and stop forcing plastic upon us.

Trish Roath, Executive Director Resource Recovery Coalition

“The Resource Recovery Coalition of California wholeheartedly applauds and supports the Assembly Joint Resolution relative to the Basel Convention. As environmental stewards in the State of California, we understand the importance of plastic recycling in a safe manner, both domestic and internationally. We strongly support the United States' ratification of the Basel Convention, and encourage the Biden Administration to do so as quickly as possible.”

Nick Lapis, Director of Advocacy, Californians Against Waste

“Dumping worthless plastic waste on countries halfway across the globe is not a sustainable solution to our trash problem,” said Nick Lapis of Californians Against Waste. “Consumers deserve to receive the recycling they are paying for, and manufacturers need to take responsibility for using truly recyclable packaging.”

Doug Kobold | Executive Director, California Product Stewardship Council

"CPSC applauds the initiative of Assembly Member Cristina Garcia, along with Assembly Co-Authors Assembly Members Quirk, Gonzales, and L. Rivas, and fellow Senate Co-Author Senators Allen, Stern, and Weickowski, to introduce an Assembly Joint Resolution 4 stating the California Legislature's support for the Basel Convention and the inclusion of plastic as a hazardous material for the purposes of the convention. Ratification of the Basel Convention by the United States is incredibly important to help stem the tide of plastic wastes that are plaguing our lands, streams and rivers, lakes, bays, and the ocean as a whole." said CPSC Executive Director Doug Kobold.

Chuck Riegler, Senior Vice President, TOMRA Systems ASA

“We need to stop viewing plastic as waste, and instead treat it as a resource and an opportunity. The linear economy model of ‘take, make, dispose’ has been accelerating for the past 40 years. At its heart is a culture of waste, viewing products as disposable, with little regard for what becomes of them once discarded. In a circular economy it is possible to collect and recycle without impacting on the product’s quality, so that products can be used again and again in a never-ending closed loop.”

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The 58th Assembly District includes the cities of Montebello, Pico Rivera, Commerce, Bell Gardens, Downey, Norwalk, Bellflower, Cerritos and Artesia.