

TURNING THE TIDE ON PLASTIC POLLUTION



01

ABOUT VOICES OF SUSTAINABILITY

Voices of Sustainability is a thought leadership platform launched by the Zayed Sustainability Prize to explore the challenges and opportunities of the global transition to an inclusive and

prosperous future. Each month, the series hosts the world's thought leaders to discuss the latest trends and themes in the sustainability agenda.



02

INTRODUCTION

On 22 April, the Zayed Sustainability Prize aired its 35th episode of the virtual fireside chat series 'Voices of Sustainability.' This episode featured Prize Selection Committee member, Gonzalo Muñoz Abogabir, Co-founder of TriCiclos and Dianna Cohen, Co-founder and CEO of Plastic

Pollution Coalition. In alignment with Earth Day, this episode of Voices of Sustainability delves into the critical battle of 'Plastics Vs. Planet,' featuring pivotal discussions with innovators tackling plastic pollution in unique ways.



03

SUMMARY

In the 35th episode of 'Voices of Sustainability,' titled 'Turning the Tide on Plastic Pollution' the series honoured Earth Day with its theme 'Plastics Vs. Planet'. Moderated by the Global Director of the ERM Sustainability Institute, Mark Lee, the episode featured Gonzalo Muñoz Abogabir and Dianna Cohen, two influential leaders in the battle against plastic pollution. We explore the genesis of their transformative efforts, what motivates them, and the urgent call for unified action to address the menace of plastic pollution on our planet.

Mark first introduced Gonzalo, Co-founder of several organisations including Ambition Loop, Manuia, SistemaB, TriCiclos and Polkura. He also served as the United Nations High-Level Action Climate Champion at the COP28 event in the UAE. Dianna Cohen, Co-founder and CEO of Plastic Pollution Coalition, joined the conversation as well.

Dianna shared her journey, growing up in Los Angeles and transitioning from a professional artist to working extensively with plastic pollution for 33 years. She highlighted the inception of Plastic Pollution Coalition in 2009, aimed at raising awareness and advocating for addressing plastic

pollution as a global issue. Dianna emphasised the importance of calling it 'plastic pollution' instead of using vague terms like 'marine debris' and 'litter'. She underscored the need for legislative changes and highlighted ongoing efforts such as the Break Free from Plastic Pollution Act and the Right to Repair Act.



Before consuming,
before disposing,
we say that waste is
nothing but an error
of design.

Gonzalo Muñoz Abogabir

High Level Champion
COP25 / Chair of Food
Strategy, Non State
Actor directive
Committee COP28





We're working to support the infrastructure that needs to be brought back to reuse materials in order to reuse glass, to sterilise it, to refill it, to reuse steel and other materials as well.

Dianna Cohen

Co-founder and CEO
Plastic Pollution Coalition

Gonzalo shared his background in agriculture, environmental science and business, revealing a pivotal moment when he realised the environmental impact of his food packaging company. Motivated by personal experiences, including his daughter's illness, he founded TriCiclos, dedicated to implementing circular economy solutions. He explained the concept of circularity, aiming to reduce waste and reuse materials efficiently. Gonzalo described their innovative recycling stations, which not only process materials but also educate and engage communities, contributing to significant waste reduction.

Mark commended the holistic approach of connecting environmental solutions with livelihoods, underscoring the importance of involving diverse stakeholders in sustainability initiatives.

He highlighted the impact of Dianna's advocacy work and Gonzalo's practical solutions in driving positive change.

Dianna elaborated on the role of art and creativity in advocating for behavioural change, drawing parallels between nature's waste management and human consumption patterns. She critiqued the linear design of single-use plastics, advocating for a shift towards reusable and refillable alternatives.

Dianna expressed concern over the disproportionate impact of plastic pollution on marginalised communities and called for collective action to address systemic issues.

Gonzalo emphasised the importance of rethinking design principles to minimise waste generation. He outlined TriCiclos's innovative recycling stations and their role in educating communities while facilitating waste management. Gonzalo highlighted the need for legislative support and international cooperation to implement effective waste management strategies globally.

In conclusion, Mark reiterated the urgency of addressing plastic pollution and praised the panellists for their commitment to driving meaningful change. He emphasised the interconnectedness of environmental, social and economic factors in tackling sustainability challenges, underscoring the importance of collaborative efforts across sectors. The conversation concluded with a call to action for individuals, businesses and policymakers to prioritise sustainable practices and foster a circular economy for a healthier planet-- not only on Earth Day but every day.

04

BIOGRAPHIES



Gonzalo Muñoz Abogabir

High Level Champion COP25 /
Chair of Food Strategy, Non State
Actor directive Committee COP28

Gonzalo was the UN Climate Change High-Level Champion from the COP25 Presidency, appointed by the Chilean Presidency in 2019. From that position, he co-led the Race to Zero, Race to Resilience and GFANZ campaigns with Nigel Topping. Previously, he co-founded and led TriCiclos, one of the most recognised Latin American companies in circular economy and recycling. Gonzalo also co-founded Sistema B (B corps in Latin America), Manuia and Polkura Winery. He is also a member of the Club of Rome. Currently, he sits on the board of the Global Foodbanking Network, CDP Latin America, TED future forum, Chapter Zero Chile, among others. At COP28, he chaired the non-state actor's strategy on food systems. At the INC, he is the general coordinator of the Friends of the Action Agenda to stop plastic pollution. Gonzalo has been recipient of the Chilean national awards on environment, innovation and social entrepreneurship; and he was awarded the honour of CMG in Queen Elizabeth's final honour's list in 2022.



Dianna Cohen

Executive Director of the Indigenous
Peoples Rights International

Dianna is Co-Founder and CEO of Plastic Pollution Coalition (PPC) and a passionate advocate for a world free from plastic pollution. A Los Angeles-based visual artist, Dianna has shown her work internationally at galleries, foundations and museums. She uses plastic in her artwork to make a visual and social impact. With plastic bags as her primary material for more than 30 years, Dianna is interested in exploring its materiality through modifications and the material's relationship to culture, media, toxicity, and the world at large and shared this in her 2010 TED talk 'Tough Truths About Plastic Pollution'. Dianna studied Biology, Art, and Film at the University of California, Los Angeles and holds a BA in Fine Arts.

The conversation was moderated by:



Mark Lee

Global Director
ERM Sustainability Institute

05

OUTCOMES



Advocacy through art and creativity has been pivotal in raising awareness about plastic pollution and driving behavioural change.



Plastic pollution stems from a flawed design, where single-use plastics are produced without consideration for their end-of-life management.



Waste management disproportionately affects marginalised communities, highlighting the need for systemic change and corporate responsibility.



Nature operates without waste, whereas human activity generates immense pollution, particularly through plastic production and disposal.



Shifting towards reusable, refillable, and reduced packaging can mitigate plastic pollution and promote a healthier planet.

Watch the full episode on the Zayed Sustainability Prize's YouTube channel

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