

## Global Action Against Plastic Pollution Urge Governments to Shun Plastic Bags Use

**Quezon City, Philippines.** Environmental advocates and concerned groups headed by the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, Zero Waste Europe and several environmental networks all over the world took action against plastic pollution. The diverse initiatives from Manila to Montenegro echoed a common demand to end plastic bags use and raise awareness regarding its impacts on the environment as part of the 2015 International Plastic Bag-free Day.

Estimates show that around 2 million plastic bags are used every minute around the world, with less than 3% being recycled globally.<sup>1</sup> A 2014 UNEP report estimates about 10 to 20 million tonnes of plastic finding its way into the world's oceans each year, costing approximately US\$13 billion per year in environmental damage to marine ecosystems, citing plastic bags as one of the most obvious sources of pollution.<sup>2</sup>

In Europe alone, the average EU citizen uses an estimated 500 plastic bags annually,<sup>3</sup> 92.5% of which are single-use. In 2010, around 90 billion single-use plastic bags were used in the EU.<sup>4</sup> In Asia, environmental pollution caused by disposable plastic materials has been significantly rising with the fast-paced lifestyle adapted by most, choosing convenience over the environment.

To address this burgeoning problem, environmental groups in many parts of the world actively work to raise awareness and urge governments continuously to adopt policies that would either ban or regulate production, distribution, consumption and disposal of plastic bags.

Zero Waste Europe cites a 2014 European Commission survey, which reveals that 92 % of respondents agree that measures should be taken to reduce the use of single-use plastic items, such as shopping bags<sup>5</sup>. *“Plastic pollution is a global problem waiting for a global solution. As an international player, the EU should lead by example and not lag behind other countries in reducing usage of single-use plastic bags. The EU has now a target for reduction in the use of plastic-bags, we call on member states to put in place necessary measures to make this a reality,”* said Joan Marc Simon from Zero Waste Europe.

The day saw a [renewed call from European groups](#); Zero Waste Europe, Fundació Prevenció de Residus, Friends of the Earth Europe, Surfrider Foundation Europe, and the European Environmental Bureau for EU Member States to act on the environmentally damaging single-use plastic bags, including the 'oxo-degradable' bags which have disastrous effects on marine environments.

Asia saw many participating groups organizing events. In Manila, Philippines, a [forum was held by a number of organizations](#) exposing the truth behind many types of 'degradable' plastic bags and their impacts on the environment. Sonia Mendoza, GAIA Philippines Board Member and Ecowaste Coalition President said *“Degradable plastic bags will not help solve our environmental problems concerning waste and pollution, as their use will merely instill and promote further the throwaway attitude and culture that have so permeated modern society,”* and called for a national ban on plastic bags in the Philippines.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.earth-policy.org/press\\_room/C68/plastic\\_bags\\_fact\\_sheet](http://www.earth-policy.org/press_room/C68/plastic_bags_fact_sheet)

<sup>2</sup> UNEP (2014) Valuing Plastics: The Business Case for Measuring, Managing and Disclosing Plastic Use in the Consumer Goods Industry.

<sup>3</sup> European Commission press release: [Commission seeks views on reducing plastic bag use](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Green Paper On a European Strategy on Plastic Waste in the Environment.](#)

<sup>5</sup> [European Commission press release, 30th June 2014](#)

*“More people are taking positive action to address the problem by choosing reusable bags and ditch disposable plastics. However, the urgency of the plastics crisis requires bold policies that would ban disposable plastics in all cities,”* said Pranay Shrestha, Chairperson, Pragma Seeds Nepal.

The recently launched Papal Encyclical “Laudato Si” also encourages the public to espouse ecological citizenship and stressed that “there is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper.”

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#### **MEDIA CONTACTS:**

Paeng Lopez, GAIA, Manila, [plopez@no-burn.org](mailto:plopez@no-burn.org) (+63 9234440733)

Joan Marc Simon, Zero Waste Europe, Brussels, [jm.simon@zerowasteurope.eu](mailto:jm.simon@zerowasteurope.eu) ( 32 2 503 4911)

Antonia Bruno, GAIA, USA, [antonia@no-burn.org](mailto:antonia@no-burn.org)

**NOTE:** Groups and organizations from across the world took action for the 6th International Plastic Bag Free Day with creative events across five continents, in a unified call for reusable, responsible alternatives.

- [Montenegro saw a 'plastic bag monster'](#) roaming the streets of Podgorica, the capital city, as Zero Waste Montenegro raised awareness of the environmental impact of single-use plastic bags and informed people of the alternative zero waste solutions. Hungarian campaigners from *Humusz* held a [flashmob and trolley race](#) to from a central square to a nearby market. In Sofia, Bulgaria, there was a ['plastic bag free party and fotomathon'](#) with theatre, music and drinks. A German group held a [film showing of 'Trashed' in Konstanz](#). And in [Slovenia a trade in scheme](#) was held, where people could swap 10 disposable plastic bags for a re-usable cotton bag. In addition to having fun and raising awareness, groups in Europe had concrete policy goals. In Europe, groups including; *Zero Waste Europe, Fundació Prevenió de Residus, Friends of the Earth Europe, Surfrider Foundation Europe*, and the *European Environmental Bureau* renewed their call for EU Member States to act on the environmentally damaging single-use plastic bags, including the 'oxo-degradable' bags which have disastrous effects on marine environments.
- In Manila, Philippines, a [forum was held by a number of organisations](#) exposing the truth behind many types of 'degradable' plastic bags and their impacts on the environment. Sonia Mendoza, President of the *EcoWaste Coalition of the Philippines*, said “Degradable plastic bags will not help solve our environmental problems concerning waste and pollution, as their use will merely instil and promote further the throwaway attitude and culture that have so permeated modern society,” and called for a ban on plastic bags in the Philippines.
- Members of the [Korea Zero Waste Movement Network](#) worked to raise awareness in front of the Seoul Jongno Tower Saengtegye, encouraging South Koreans to stop using single-use plastic bags, and instead use reusable shopping baskets.

And in [Hong-Kong and Taiwan groups](#) encouraged people to “Say no to plastic bags!” and reduce their use of disposable bags.

- **Other participating groups in Asia includes:** **BANGLADESH** - Environment and Social Development Organization –ESDO; **HONG KONG**- Plastic Shopping Bag Collaborative Platform (Green Power, Greeners Action, The Conservancy Association); **INDIA**- Bethany Society, Meghalaya, Sustainable Development Forum Nagaland (SDFN), Thanal and Zero Waste Himalayas in Sikkim and Darjeeling; **INDONESIA** - ASEAN Reusable Bag Campaign, HiLo Green Community; Gerakan Indonesia Diet Kantong Plastik (GIDKP); Bali Free From Plastic Bags; YPBB Bandung; **NEPAL**- Pragma Seeds Nepal; **PHILIPPINES**- Cavite Green Coalition, City of Manila – Office of Councilor Uno Lim, Earth Island Institute, EARTH-UST, Ecowaste Coalition, GAIA (Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives), Greenpeace South East Asia, Mother Earth Foundation, Save Manila Bay Movement; **TAIWAN**- Taiwan Watch Institute
- In Botswana, [Somarelang Tikologo](#) (Environment Watch Botswana), called upon the Botswanan government to enforce their levy on plastic bags, which officially came into force in 2006 and use the proceeds to fund environmental activities in Botswana, saying “We also call on the government to use the levy as it was intended to create a cleaner Botswana.”
- The [Kicking the Bags Out](#) campaign in Zambia lobbied for a plastic bag ban or fee across Zambia as part of a community solution to the issue of clogged drainage systems from plastic bag waste and donated reusable bags to legislators and ministers.
- In Canada [volunteers on Vancouver Island](#) offered reusable bags by donation and held a voluntary plastic bag ban.

Many of the events and actions, which took place, are available to view on world map at <http://www.plasticbagfreeday.org/> where you can read stories, view actions.