

## From Single Use to Systems Change: A Call to Action

Our planet is fragile, and experiencing a dual crisis of runaway climate change and unprecedented biodiversity loss. Global temperature rise may already have passed a point of no return due to escalating CO2 levels in the Earth's atmosphere, and the decline and loss of species globally means the web of life is unravelling faster than we can repair it.

Forest and ocean ecosystems are fundamental to the health of our planet and our survival. Forests provide up to 30 per cent of the carbon reductions required to stabilize our climate,<sup>1</sup> and are home to 80 per cent of the world's terrestrial biodiversity<sup>2</sup>; forests purify our air and water, and provide a buffer against disease. Oceans store vast amounts of carbon dioxide and act as natural solutions to climate change, and they provide rich, complex ecosystems for marine life that also provide billions of people with food and livelihoods.

Yet as we continue to consume natural resources at an unsustainable rate, the resilience of these precious ecosystems is fundamentally undermined.

Since the 1970s our consumption of single use, disposable products have skyrocketed, largely due to growing consumerism, and a culture of convenience. We produce 2 billion tonnes of waste each year and this figure is projected to increase by 70 per cent by 2050<sup>3</sup>. Single use products are a key contributor to this: when not effectively recycled, they are burned, sent to dumpsites or landfills, or simply left to degrade our environment and poison our oceans.

From cradle to grave, single use products leave behind a legacy of negative environmental impacts that humanity and the earth's resources can simply not afford.

Equally important, their production and disposal are disproportionately harming indigenous communities, people of colour and vulnerable populations whose territories and homes are often situated close to production regions and plants, or waste sites of extractive industries.

The use of both plastic and paper for single use products causes significant and lasting environmental harm that we urgently need to address. Of the 300 million tonnes of plastic produced each year, half of that goes into single use products and applications<sup>4</sup>. Since plastic is derived from fossil fuel extraction and manufacturing, its very production contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. The life cycle of paper-based single use products derived from trees is similarly devastating, and yet often under-estimated. Carbon released in the logging process contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, and the removal of natural

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/UNFF14-BkgdStudy-SDG13- March2019.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/biodiversity/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://sensoneo.com/sensoneo-global-waste-index-2019/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/single-use-plastics-101>

forests eliminate the ability of those forests to continue to mitigate against climate change. Each year, three billion trees are cut down to make paper packaging<sup>5</sup>, and that's projected to increase by 20 per cent over the next five years<sup>6</sup>.

Less than 10 percent of all the plastics ever produced has been recycled<sup>7</sup>, and a mere four percent of that has been recycled back into products of the same quality as the original. When it ends up in oceans or scattered on land, plastic waste breaks down into microplastics, infinitely tiny toxic pieces that are ingested by species of all kinds, including humans with untold health consequences. Both paper and plastics

manufacturing are chemically intensive, energy-intensive, and require large amounts of water - and the reality is, eliminating the majority of single use products immediately will help conserve irreplaceable resources.

There are notable exceptions when single use commodities may be the most appropriate product, in particular in health care and in some scientific research industries. The overwhelming majority of single use products, especially throwaway packaging can, however, be eliminated or phased out quickly, and replaced with circular systems that promote re-use and reduction.

To achieve the goals set out in the Paris Agreement and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, and in recognition of universal human rights, there needs to be a collective shift in the way we design and manufacture products to avoid waste. Many of the solutions needed to make a waste-free and regenerative society already exist, but the pace and scale of change needs to escalate dramatically.

**We therefore call for an end to single use, throwaway commodities, and call for transformational change to our production, consumption and end-of-use systems to enable a truly circular economy.**

This will require commitments and effective collaboration from government, business, financial institutions and investors, the non-profit sector, and civil society.

Accordingly, we call on all relevant bodies to:

- **Re-direct:** public and private funds to support the start-up and scale-up of systems that support reusable products and circularity, and disincentivize continuation of single use commodities by increasing levies and taxes on those products and the systems that prop them up.
- **Re-design to support:**
  - **Responsible material lifecycles:** Ensure that the life cycle of the materials and products we use – from extraction and production, to end use, recycling, composting, and

disposal – sustain the health of the people and the planet.

<sup>5</sup> <https://canopyplanet.org/campaigns/pack4good/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.futuremarketinsights.com/reports/paper-packaging-market>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unenvironment.org/interactive/beat-plastic-pollution/>

- **Responsible and clean production:** Ensure producers take responsibility for the full life cycle costs and impacts of their products and packaging, and redesign and innovate better products from renewable, safe and sustainable feedstocks and move towards systems that facilitate circularity.
  
- **Responsible consumption:** reject single-use products in favour of reusable ones made with the lowest possible environmental and social footprint.
  
- **Reward innovation:** to help scale-up lasting solutions that are widely adopted and benefit both people and the planet.
  
- **Reparation for damage:** recognize and accept responsibility for harm caused recently and historically by the production and consumption of single use products, in particular, to indigenous peoples and people of colour, who are often disproportionately affected by modern extractive and pollutive industries.
  
- **Restore:** degraded natural habitats that have been impacted as a result of the production and disposal of products and packaging, whilst recognizing the important role that local and indigenous communities play in conservation and restoration. Protect and promote sustainable use of forest and marine ecosystems to enable a circular economy supported by closed-loop regenerative feedstocks.

## 188 NGO Signatories to the Call to Action

350 Triangle (US) - 5 Gyres Institute (US) - AASHE (the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education) (US) - AEEFG (l'Association de l'éducation environnementale pour les futures générations) (Tunisia) - Aotearoa Plastic Pollution Alliance (New Zealand) - Algalita (US) - Alliance for Zero Waste Indonesia Alliance of Mission-Based Recyclers (AMBR) (US) - All Our Energy (US) - Amigos de la Tierra (Spain) - A Plastic Planet (UK) - Ancient Forest Alliance (Canada) - Asian Center for Environmental Health (Bangladesh) - Ban SUP (US) - Basel Action Network (US) - Battle Creek Alliance (US) - Beaches Reduces (Canada) - Beyond Plastics (US) - Biodiversity Conservation Centre (Russia) - Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation (Indonesia) - Break Free From Plastic (Global) BRINGiT (US) - Bye Bye Plastic Bags (Indonesia) - CAG (India) - Canadian Engaged Buddhism Association (Canada) - Canopy (Canada) - Carrizo Comecrudo Tribe of Texas (US) - Center for Biological Diversity (US) - Center for Environmental Health - Center for Environment, Justice and Development (Kenya) - Center for Sustainable Communities (US) - Centre 4 Zero Waste & Development in Africa - CZWDA (Zambia) - Centre de Recherche et d'Éducation pour le Développement (Cameroon) - Chintan Environmental

Research and Action Group (India) - Clean Air Council (US) - Community Environmental Council (US) - Concerned Citizens of Northhampton County (US) - Conservatree (Canada) - Consumers Association of Penang - CAP (Malaysia) - Cooperate Earth (US) - David Suzuki Foundation (Canada) - Denkhausembrem (Germany) - Deutsche Umwelthilfe (Germany) - Dogwood Alliance (US) - Earth Action, Inc. (US) - EARTHDAY.ORG (US) - Eco Hamilton Collective (Canada) - Ecological Alert and Recovery Thailand - EARTHEcology Center (US) - Ecowaste Coalition (Philippines) - Education, Economics, Environmental, Climate and Health Organization (EEECHO) (US) - Ekologi brez meja (Slovenia) - Environmental Defence Canada (Canada) - Environmental Paper Network (Global) - ESDO - Environment and Social Development Organization (Bangladesh) - ETOBICOKE COMMUNITY FUTURES (Canada) - European Environmental Bureau (Europe) - Everyday Plastic (UK) - Fenceline Watch (US) - Fern (Brussels) - FoN4Plastics (Ghana) - Forum Konservasi Leuser (Indonesia) - Forest Peoples Programme (UK) - Forum Ökologie & Papier (Germany) - FracTracker Alliance (US) - Friends of Clayoquot Sound (Canada) - Friends of the Nation (Ghana) - Friends of the Siberian Forest (Russia) - Fundación El Árbol (Chile) - GAIA (Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives) (Global) - Gallifrey Foundation (Switzerland) - German Marine Litter Association e.V. (Germany) - glasswaters foundation (Canada) - Global 2000, Friends of the Earth (Austria) - Global Justice Ecology Project (US) - Global Environment Forum (Japan) - GlobalSunriseProject (Canada) - Green 13 (Canada) - Green America (US) - Green Anhui (China) - Greeners Action (HK) - Greenpeace Canada - Greenpeace International - Greenpeace Japan - Greenpeace Thailand - Greenpeace USA - HAKA (Indonesia) - Hannah4Change (US) - Health Care Without Harm SE Asia (Philippines) - Health Care Without Harm (US) - Heartwood (US) - Health and Environment Justice Support International - HEJSupport (Global) - Healthy Gulf (US) - HELPSY (US) - Humusz Szövetség (Hungary) - Indonesia Plastic Bag Diet Movement - Inland Ocean Coalition (US) - Interfacing Development Interventions for Sustainability (Philippines) - Japri.org (US) - JATAN (Japan) - John Muir Project of Earth Island Institute (US) - Less Plastic (UK) - Mansfield Recycling Connecticut (US) - Marine Conservation Society (UK) - Mother Earth Foundation (Philippines) - New Zealand Product Stewardship Council (New Zealand) - Nexus3 Foundation (Indonesia) - No Plastic In My Sea (France) - Occidental Arts and Ecology Center (US) - Ocean Care (Global) - Oceanic Global (Global) - Organized, Uplifting, Resources, & Strategies (US) - Pacific Environment (US) - Peak Plastic Foundation (US) - Pesticide Action Network - PANeM (Mauritius) - Partnership for Policy Integrity (US) - Pickup China Pipeline Safety Coalition (US) - Plastic Change (Denmark) - Plastic Free China - Plastic Free Delaware (US) - Plastic Free Future (US) - Plastic Free Hackney (UK) - Plastic Free Seas (Hong Kong) - Plastic Pollution Coalition (Global) - Plastics Rebellion (Global) - Plastic Soup Foundation (Netherlands, UK) - Plastic Soup Surfer (Netherlands) - Polish Zero Waste Association - Portland State University (US) - Project Mariknows (Philippines) - Question Consumption (US) - Rachel Carson Council (US) - Rainforest Action Network (US) - Rainforest Relief (US) - RAPAM (Mexico) - Recycling Network Benelux (the Netherlands/Belgium) - Remark.eco (US) - Re-nourish (US) - RESTORE: The North Woods (US) - Retorna (Spain) - Roncy Reduces (Canada) - Sahabat Alam Malaysia - Sandhills Cooperation Association (US) - Savitri Waney Charitable Trust (London) - Sciaena (Portugal) - Sea Hugger (US) - Seas At Risk (Belgium) - Shenzhen Zero Waste/Toxic Free Corps (China) - Sierra Club BC (Canada) - Society of Native Nations (US) - Soil Cycle (US) - South Shore Recycling Cooperative (US) - Stand.earth (US/Canada) - StopPlastics (Canada) - SUPER (US) - Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (US) - Takeaway Throwaways (New Zealand) - Taller Ecologista (Argentina) - Texas Campaign for the Environment (US) - The Center for Oceanic Awareness, Research and Education (US) - The Green Earth (Hong Kong) - The High 5 Initiative (US) - The Last Plastic Straw (US) - The Repurpose Project (US) - The Rubbish Trip (New Zealand) - The Story of Stuff Project (US) - The Sustainable Angle (UK/Switzerland) - Toward Zero Waste (US) - UPSTREAM (US) - Vegans & Vegetarians of Alberta (Canada) - Vietnam Zero Waste Alliance - VOICE of Irish Concern for the Environment (Ireland) - Wild Heritage (US) - Wild Nature Institute (US) - Wildsight (Canada) -

**Women Engage for a Common Future International (Global) - Women's Environmental Network - WEN (UK) - Women's Voices for the Earth (Global) - XR Zero Waste (UK) - ZERO (Portugal) - Zero Waste British Columbia (Canada) - Zero Waste Europe (Brussels) - Zero Waste France - Zero Waste Washington (US) - Zero Waste Hub Toronto**