

Real Corporate Courage and Leadership is Needed to Reverse the Plastic Pollution Crisis

Plastic pollution and production now threaten all living things — in the air, on land and at sea. This global environmental health emergency demands that we establish new foundations for how we produce, consume and dispose of our food and all of our goods. Our throwaway culture is no longer viable.

When it comes to most current consumer goods, the use of throwaway, single-use packaging is no longer acceptable. Such problematic packaging — designed to end up as waste and pollution the minute they are made — are massive contributors to the plastic pollution overwhelming nature and suffocating our oceans and waterways. Worse, over the next 10 years, plastic production is expected to increase by 40%, and packaging accounts for one third of this total. The evidence is mounting and getting more difficult to ignore: plastic pollution is harmful to people, to animals, to the environment, and to our climate. Left unchecked, the unfettered production of single-use, unrecyclable, and non-essential plastics could lead to more problems of a global and catastrophic scale.

Break Free From Plastic's recent report, ***Branded: In Search of the World's Top Corporate Plastic Polluters***, reinforces the need for corporations to 'accept responsibility for the full life-cycle impacts of their products and the packaging in which their products are sold.' The report outlines that 'Waste management systems and environments worldwide are suffering under the weight of a planned 40% increase in the production of plastics, and consumer goods companies have an opportunity and an obligation to stop this crisis where it starts. Responsibility for this plastic pollution problem lies not with individual "litterbugs," but with corporate polluters who must adopt sustainable solutions and systems to stop the crisis.'

Plastic pollution is a transboundary and complex problem with significant and long-lasting social, economic, and environmental impacts.

- Up to 80% of ocean litter — much of which is plastic — is estimated to be delivered by river systems from inland sources.
- By 2025, global plastics production is expected to increase by 40%.
- Recent data shows that only 9% of all plastic ever discarded since 1950 has been recycled while the rest is still present in the environment.
- Packaging accounts for about one-third of plastic production, and much of this is designed for single-use, with 95% of its material value (or \$80-120 billion per year) lost to the economy after a short first use.

It is clear that recycling alone cannot solve the plastic pollution crisis. While community cleanups are growing in popularity, they are not the answer to this crisis. Contrary to an implicit message repeated by corporations, the blame does not lie in countries with poor waste management systems, but in those who irresponsibly put an ever-increasing amount of single-use plastics on the market worldwide, and those who allow that. The solution needs to be multi-dimensional, encompassing legally binding global standards, national and local legislation, greater public awareness about the need to shift away from a 'throwaway' culture, and corporations taking responsibility for stopping plastic pollution at the source.

Communities around the world are demanding an end to the plague of plastic pollution; individuals are seeking reusables and alternative systems and materials, while governments are deliberating bans on single-use plastics, taxes and stronger lifecycle and Extended Producer Responsibility policies. Corporations — working with governments and civil society — can solve this problem if they want to **but no large company has yet had the courage to implement serious plastics reduction policies and institute new delivery systems that do not rely on disposable, throwaway plastic.**

Corporate leadership, from all tiers of the plastics supply chain, and in particular from fast-moving consumer goods companies and plastic producers, is needed to reduce the volume of plastic packaging and production. True corporate leadership requires significant, clear and transparent commitments to this end, but most importantly, it requires urgent, concrete, comprehensive, and time-bound action. **This leadership is needed now.**

The first step is full acknowledgement of the root of the plastic pollution crisis — committing to stop promoting a throwaway culture and recognising that we cannot simply recycle our way out of the plastic pollution crisis. The second step is to commit to change with strong reduction targets, and demonstrate it, not only in statements and policies but in immediate practice.

At a minimum and in particular for all companies involved in consumer goods production and retail, real change necessitates that they:

- 1. Commit to a plastic footprint reduction policy to dramatically reduce single-use plastic production and usage — with a publicly available action plan and timeline that shows measurable, independently audited results by 2020.** They must demonstrate clear accountability by transparently reporting on their plastic footprint — the plastics they used, as well as reduction, reuse, recycling, and disposal rates of their own products around the world;
- 2. Re-envision a delivery system that disincentivises single-use, throwaway packaging; prioritising significant investments in reusables and refill systems;**
- 3. Redesign their products to end the use of microplastics, including microbeads, and other sources of microplastics and microfibres;**

4. **Collaborate with retailers, government, and NGOs to create scalable solutions to plastic pollution — including support for ambitious legislation that rewards plastics reduction and penalises plastics overuse.**
5. **Reject false and unproven solutions including waste incineration and thermal waste-to-energy technologies, chemical recycling, plastic roads or construction materials using residual plastics and other back-end replacements which are not durable, multi-use, further recyclable and non-toxic.** In the absence of strong upstream commitments and measures to reduce and eliminate problematic plastics, such approaches simply perpetuate business as usual, and give companies the excuse to produce and use more of the plastic materials and products that have brought us to this crisis in the first place.
6. **Avoid regrettable replacements, such as bioplastics and apply the precautionary principle — banning hazardous chemicals, prohibiting and preventing toxic recycling, and avoiding the switch to alternative single-use products and materials.**

We still have time to solve this issue. Corporations have an urgent and immediate obligation to stop over-packaging, to redesign product delivery systems in ways that minimise and eliminate waste, and to take responsibility for the plastic pollution they are pumping into the environment.

Most important of all, in order to reverse this crisis conclusively, corporations must start the larger shift away from fossil fuel dependency, recognising that the fossil fuel and petrochemical industry should not be allowed to simply continue and expand plastic production to extend the lifetime of its highly polluting activities. This should start with companies recognising, and paying for the full costs associated with plastics pollution, such as but not limited to human health impacts (e.g. cancer and other developmental deficits), biodiversity harm and costs to marine ecosystem degradation, air and water pollution, cleanup and waste management costs, impacts of fracking, and climate change.

Break Free From Plastic is a global movement of more than 1,400 member groups and thousands of individuals united around a common goal: to bring systemic change through a holistic approach that tackles plastic pollution across the entire plastics value chain, focusing on prevention rather than cure and on providing effective solutions.

Find out more and [get involved - join us now!](#)

Name of Organisation

Alliance for Zero Waste Indonesia	NESMAC KITARA LTD
Amigos de la Tierra España	Network On Sound Management Of Chemicals Kitara (NESMAC-KITARA)
BaliFokus/Nexus3 Foundation	Nipe Fagio
Bizu Environment Science Studio	Oceana
Bye Bye Plastic Bag	Pacific Environment
Center for International Environmental Law	Perkumpulan Gerakan Indonesia Diet Kantong Plastik (Plastic Bag Diet Movement)
Centre for Zero Waste & Development	Pesticide Action Nexus Association
CESTA FOE El Salvador	Plastic Change
City to Sea	Plastic Free Seas
Community Environmental Monitoring, India	Plastic Pollution Coalition
Community Sanitation And Recycling Organization (CSARO)	Plastic Soup Foundation
Consumers' Association of Penang	Plataforma Retorna
Development Indian Ocean Network (DION)	Recycling Netwerk Benelux
Društvo Ekologi brez meja	Sahabat Alam Malaysia (Friends of the Earth Malaysia)
Earthworks	Shanghai Rendu Ocean NPO Development Center
Ecologists without borders	Surfers Against Sewage
Ecology Center	Surfrider Foundation Europe
EcoSouk by Recycle Lebanon	SWaCH Pune
ECOTON Foundation	Taller Ecologista
Ecowaste Coalition of the Philippines	Thanal
Environment and Social Development Organization-ESDO	The 5 Gyres Institute
Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA)	The Last Plastic Straw
GAIA	The Story of Stuff Project
Greeners Action	Toxics-Free China
Greenpeace	Trash Hero
Health Care Without Harm Asia	UPSTREAM
Heinrich Böll Foundation	WALHI
Humusz Szövetség	WECF International

IPEN for a toxics-free future

Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat

Let's Do It Foundation

Marine Conservation Society

Mother Earth Foundation

National Toxics Network Australia

Wild at Heart Legal Defense Association, Taiwan

Zelena akcija / Friends of the Earth Croatia

Zero Waste Europe

Zero Waste France

Zero Zbel

Zheng Xue