

NGO Major Group

Intervention for Agenda item 5: Local, Regional and International response...

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Representing NGO: GAIA – Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives

Thank you Madame Co-Chair,

I represent the NGO GAIA, Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, a network of more than 800 grassroots groups, NGOs and individuals who are working together to advance Zero Waste solutions. I am speaking on behalf of 6 Major Groups: Women, NGO, Children & Youth, Farmers, Indigenous Peoples, and Science & Technology major groups.

GAIA has been working together with local NGO partners and local government units in different parts of Asia to implement Zero Waste approaches in the management of resources. We believe that the problem of marine plastic litter can be solved via a Zero Waste approach.

Zero Waste is a management solution that addresses the waste problem at root, unlike incinerators which are end-of-pipe treatments that are, at best, stopgap and aesthetic measures.

Put simply, the Zero Waste approach is a commitment to waste prevention. Cities and institutions enact policies for waste reduction, composting, recycling and reuse, changes in consumption habits, and redesign.

Zero Waste systems protect the environment and public health, help communities and cities build robust local economies, generates productive jobs and livelihoods, and help mitigate climate change. It is an integral part of a green, circular economy.

The difference with Zero Waste and systems such as incineration which is being considered in the document as a response to the problem, is that it is not an end-of-pipe approach. It considers marine plastic pollution from source. Compared to incineration or so-called “waste-to-energy,” Zero Waste is circular, not linear.

With local NGOs, we have worked with coastal communities in Asia, through their local government units to implement Zero Waste. Currently we have ongoing Zero Waste projects with coastal cities such as Tacloban City, Dumaguete City, Malabon City and Navotas City, as well as some cities (not all coastal) in Indonesia, India and Malaysia. One of the most successful Zero Waste cities we have worked with is the City of San Fernando in Pampanga.

In some of these cities, authorities have enacted plastic bag bans to reduce plastic pollution. But that is not enough. In recent waste characterization surveys our partners conducted in six Philippine cities, unlabeled plastic bags, straws, polystyrene etc make up around 26% of all plastic residual waste. The majority of plastic residual waste, 74%, are product packaging, specifically disposable flexible plastic packaging that are used to market shampoo, detergent, coffee, etc. A lot of these are sachets—single serve throwaway plastic packaging that can be as small as 3x3cm.

In a beach clean-up brand audit we conducted with partners in Manila Bay last September 2017, plastic sachet packaging dominated the amount of residuals collected. The top

polluters of sachet and non-recyclable plastic packaging are multinational companies such as Nestle, Unilever and Proctor and Gamble.

What can local authorities do about these kinds of packaging? The companies have left it up to the local government units to dispose of this waste. People also have little choice but to buy them, most of their basic necessities are packaged in sachets. We think this points to the bigger need for companies to change their current practices. If they change their packaging practices—for example to reduce the production of plastic packaging and market products in dispensers and encourage refill containers—bigger and more immediate impact can be achieved to drastically reduce the leakage of plastic sachets to our coasts.

In many of the discussions in this meeting so far, the focus has been on local authorities and their waste management systems, and behavioral change for people. But let us not make that distract us that there is bigger impact in reducing marine plastic pollution when companies change their packaging. If this is done in an international scale, the impact will be greater.

Thank you.