

Mottainai
もったいない
Youth Declaration
on Zero Waste & Circularity

Developed By: Children and Youth Major Group to UNEP



Preamble

We, the **youth of the world**, united in our commitment to environmental sustainability, recognize the **urgent need to address the escalating global waste crisis** and advance a just transition to circular systems towards a zero waste society. Together, we pledge to drive change, innovate solutions, and engage all stakeholders in the transition to a zero-waste system.

This declaration is the **outcome of a series of virtual global youth consultations** and the **Youth Day of the UNEP IETC Global Dialogue** on Circular Economy Model of Waste Management, held on **19th February 2025 in Osaka, Japan**. It reflects the voices of young people worldwide and our collective determination to advance policies and practices that enable just waste management systems, circularity, and the transition to zero waste. Despite progress in policies and legislations, gaps remain in awareness, implementation, cross-sectoral integration, and financing for circular and zero waste practices.

Waste mismanagement has **severe and disproportionate health impacts on vulnerable groups**, including infants, children, women, the elderly, persons with disabilities, informal workers and displaced communities. Ensuring **access to opportunities, resources, and safe working environments** as well as the **participation of stakeholders in decision-making** is essential for a just circular and zero waste society.

Gender equality must be mainstreamed across all waste management policies and practices. Women and girls, particularly those working in the **informal waste sector**, often face discrimination, unsafe working conditions, and economic disparities. Recognizing their contributions including household activities and childcare, ensuring fair pay and providing access to safe working environments and leadership and decision making opportunities are critical to a just transition toward a circular economy.

With this declaration, **we call upon** governments, international organizations, private sector actors, and civil society **to work with youth as partners** in **accelerating the transition to zero waste and circularity**. Together, we can increase awareness and create systems that are resilient, inclusive, and regenerative-ensuring no one is left behind in the pursuit of a zero waste future.

Commitment to Zero Waste Values

1. Lifestyle: Responsible Consumption and Production

- We commit to taking a lifecycle perspective on products and services during consumption and production in our communities.
- We commit to adopting responsible consumption practices, rethinking our choices, and choosing products that reduce waste and reliance on single-use items.
- We commit to promoting intergenerational equity, ensuring that our actions today do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their and our own needs, and advocating for inclusive decision-making processes.

2. Waste Justice: Systems and Services

- We commit to understanding our local waste management systems, inclusive of informal workers and to support the safeguarding of the local communities.
- We commit to taking a just transition lens to integrate informal waste workers (recognition, fair compensation, their dignity, and integration) into circular economy practices.
- We commit to understanding our role in waste management and learning how to close the loop on our products and services.
- We commit to understanding the current state of pollution in our local communities.
- We commit to advocate against injustices in waste management such as the criminalization of environmental defenders, and displacement due to pollution.
- We commit to utilize all available resources to build capacity, develop technology, and disseminate information both domestically and internationally in order to solve the problem of pollution without discrimination.
- We commit to raising awareness in our communities about the impact of waste and the importance of waste management through knowledge to inspire action such as through using social media and local events like clean-up drives.

Commitment to Zero Waste Values

3. Problem-solving: Championing Circularity and Zero Waste in Policies and Programs

- We commit to fostering youth-led initiatives that promote innovative solutions to waste management challenges.
- We commit to actively engaging in policy advocacy, encouraging our local and national governments to implement policies that support circularity and protect vulnerable communities, especially those in the informal waste sector.
- We commit to translating evidence into accessible information to educate our communities and provide platforms for knowledge and experience exchange.
- We commit to building alliances that transcend generations, sectors, regions, and national borders to continuously advance rational and ambitious proposals based on scientific evidence and economic rationality focusing on local and regional specific pollution and waste management.

4. Local and Global Collaboration: Knowledge Exchange and Cooperation

- We commit to building local zero waste policies within our systems such as academic institutions, civil society organizations, public and private sector.
- We commit to sharing knowledge and best practices in our local and global networks across sectors in a safe, inclusive and accessible manner, especially youth-led innovations at the forefront of circular economy development.
- We commit to using International Zero Waste Day on March 30th as an opportunity to raise awareness about waste management and best practices in our communities including but not limited to events, workshops, and social media posts.
- We commit to collaborating for advising and creating policy input and research for better local, regional, and global policy instruments for the circular economy We hope each company has an easily-accessible platform where youth can write their ideas about the environment (ex. Change overlapping).

Calls to Action

1. We call for **intergenerational equity principles** to be embedded in all waste management and circular economy policies and initiatives. The transition to a zero-waste society must be just, fair, and inclusive, ensuring that no community, worker, or young person is left behind in the shift toward sustainable development.
2. We call for **local, subregional, regional, and global governance institutions to dedicate space for children and youth** in current and future decision-making processes on circular economy and waste management policies.
3. We call for governments to **strengthen waste management legislation**, ensure enforceable regulations that reduce single-use waste, promote sustainable practices, enable circularity, protect the environment, promote green and decent jobs, and uphold social justice principles relevant to local and cultural traditions.
4. We call for **comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems** that assess the effectiveness of waste management policies and the participation of local actors, ensuring transparency, effectiveness, and accountability in their implementation.
5. We call for **waste management policies that prioritize social justice, ensuring that marginalized and vulnerable communities**, including infants, children, women, the elderly, people on the move, and those in informal and precarious labor, are protected and supported through equitable (just) waste management systems.
6. We call on **individuals and communities to practice** proper categorization and sorting of waste which enables recycling, reusing, and repurposing.
7. We call for the **elimination of illegal child labor and gender-based violence** in the waste sector, ensuring strict enforcement of labor protections, access to information, remedy, and legal assistance services, access to education, and safe, dignified working conditions for all people including the children and youth in the waste ecosystem.

Calls to Action

8. We call on **governments and businesses to integrate public health considerations** into waste management policies, addressing the severe health impacts of exposure to hazardous waste, poor sanitation, and pollution, especially on vulnerable populations.
9. We call for **formal recognition, legal protections, and fair wages for informal waste workers**, with special attention to the **gendered dimensions** of informal labor, ensuring that women waste workers are economically empowered and protected from exploitation.
10. We call for the **inclusion of youth voices in Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies, we are ready to engage** in monitoring and evaluation of compliance to EPR on a national and global level.
11. We call for the **establishment of inclusive public-private partnerships that actively involve youth** in waste management initiatives, ensuring financial and technical support for youth-led projects and opportunities for green jobs.
12. We call for the **private sector to provide transparent consumer information** on the **lifecycle of products and services** for informed-decision making and to partner with the local government in managing waste collection processes and have metrics to show data that can help in policy formulation and decision making.
13. We call for **youth engagement to be integrated into local, regional, and global waste management policies and decision-making platforms**, including through the participation of youth to deliver their contributions towards the works of the **United Nations Secretary General Advisory Board on Zero Waste**.

Children and Youth Major Group (CYMG) to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the mandated official, formal and self-organized space for children and youth to contribute to and engage in intergovernmental and allied policy processes at UNEP and relevant environmental governance processes in the broader UN system.



www.cymgenv.net



admin@cymgenv.net