

CLOSING REMARKS

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(To be delivered by David Vivas Eugui on her behalf)

ICCF-AIPA-UNCTAD Joint Briefing:

Technology and Innovation Solutions to address Marine Debris in Southeast Asia

Bogor, Indonesia | 6 July 2023

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for your active participation and insightful discussions throughout this ICCF-AIPA-UNCTAD Joint Briefing on Technology and Innovation Solutions to address Marine Debris in Southeast Asia.

It has been an enlightening and productive event, during which we have collectively explored strategies to tackle the pressing issue of marine debris in the region.

As we conclude this briefing, I would like to emphasize three key points that are crucial for reducing marine debris in the region. These points reflect the urgency and complexity of the challenge we face and the need for collaborative action among all stakeholders in the countries represented here today, namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

Firstly, it is essential to adjust the incentives structure for marketed products. We must address the existing fossil fuel subsidies that reinforce market presence of polluting materials and products, such as plastic polymer, and reconsider the low import tariffs currently applied to single-use plastics. By aligning economic incentives and regulations with sustainability goals, we can discourage the use of environmentally harmful materials and promote the adoption of more sustainable alternatives.

Secondly, adopting comprehensive control measures to regulate plastics across their value chain is essential. UNCTAD's efforts to contribute to progress on this has resulted in an illustrative list that can be used to identify trade/border measures and internal market measures as a basis for discussion. This includes measures that more strictly govern the production, use, and disposal of plastics, as well as the regulation of its import. It is crucial that these control measures are compatible with international efforts to promote harmonization in plastic control and governance globally. The ongoing negotiations under the United Nations through the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee process are vital in establishing a unified and coordinated approach to address plastic pollution worldwide, including in Southeast Asia.

Thirdly, reducing marine debris necessitates a concerted effort to search for and facilitate the adoption of the right products and services.

On products, we need to seriously consider using more material substitutes instead of plastics. UNCTAD recently identified 282 Harmonized System codes for products and materials that could replace plastics, revealing potential areas for increased trade. These include nature-based plastic substitutes materials and by products that are sustainable, biodegradable, compostable, erodible and/or recyclable. Also, these materials and by products are being improved with new waves of a mix of innovation and traditional knowledge that generated environmental and social benefits, particularly in Asia.

This goes beyond considering equipment directly involved on sea vessels; it extends to all sectors of our economies (bags, bottles, disposable items like cutlery, etc.). Plastics used inside countries know no borders, and they often end up polluting riverine systems (such as the Mekong basin), eventually finding their way into the ocean. Here, UNCTAD has commissioned research into material substitutes to plastic products in certain critical sectors in the region. We must actively explore and promote the adoption of sustainable material substitutes throughout the region.

Equally, we need **facilitation for trade-in-services** which help us prevent pollution (such as filters use, packageless retail systems and better end of life of product design,) and for services that help us mitigate the problem (such as better recycling, collection, and remediation services). As a response, UNCTAD is carrying out an initial mapping and classification of services that contribute to prevention and mitigation of plastic pollution. Both the product and service angles require collaboration among industries, administrations, parliamentarians, and research institutions to develop and implement innovative solutions for a new generation of sustainable services.

In closing, I would like to express my appreciation to all the parliamentarians, experts, and stakeholders who have contributed their valuable insights and perspectives during this briefing. Your dedication and commitment to addressing the issue of marine debris in Southeast Asia is heartening.

Let us carry the momentum and knowledge gained from this event into our respective spheres of influence. UNCTAD has been supporting parliamentarians in East Africa to harmonize policy on single-use plastics at the East African Community level, and we are happy to see the same interest and engagement in Southeast Asia. If we work together, we can drive the necessary changes to achieve a cleaner and healthier marine environment for this region and future generations.

Thank you once again,

[End of closing remarks]

