



## World Environment Day 2018: Overview

World Environment Day is the UN's most important day for encouraging worldwide awareness and action for the protection of our environment. Since it began in 1974, it has grown to become a global platform for public outreach that is widely celebrated in over 100 countries.

### BEAT PLASTIC POLLUTION

“Beat Plastic Pollution”, the theme for World Environment Day 2018, is a call to action for all of us to come together to combat one of the great environmental challenges of our time. The theme invites us all to consider how we can make changes in our everyday lives to reduce the heavy burden of plastic pollution on our natural places, our wildlife – and our own health.

While plastic has many valuable uses, we have become over reliant on single-use or disposable plastic – with severe environmental consequences. This World Environment Day we'll be engaging partners from all corners of society and the world to join us in raising awareness and inspiring action to form the global movement needed to beat plastic pollution for good.

### INDIA 2018

India's emergence as a global environmental leader has been affirmed to the world in recent years. For those who know the country and its people, India's place in the vanguard on issues ranging from climate change to plastic pollution is a natural fit. In the months to come, India will once again display its leadership and innovation on the world stage.

As hosts to this year's World Environment Day, Indian communities large and small will lead a global charge to beat plastic pollution through civic engagement and celebration. With support from an inspiring cross section of Indian society, ranging from cricket pitches to board rooms, we're witnessing an unprecedented national commitment to this global cause, with the promise to make this the largest and most consequential World Environment Day ever.

## Global Plastic Pollution by the Numbers:

- 500 billion plastic bags used each year
- 13 million tonnes of plastic leak into the ocean each year
- 17 million barrels of oil used on plastic production each year
- 1 million plastic bottles bought every minute
- 100,000 marine animals killed by plastics each year
- 100 years for plastic to degrade in the environment
- 90% of bottled water found to contain plastic particles
- 83% of tap water found to contain plastic particles
- 50% of consumer plastics are single use
- 10% of all human-generated waste is plastic



## Key Messages:

To beat plastic pollution, we need to entirely rethink our approach to designing, producing and using plastic products. This World Environment Day, our goal is to inspire the kind of solutions that lead to sustainable behaviour change upstream. We'll build on the global momentum to beat plastic pollution and use World Environment Day as a turning point to inspire innovators, activists and leaders worldwide to do more than just clean up existing plastics, but also focus our action upstream. Our goal is to foster the dialogue that leads to new models for plastic production and consumption. Individuals, the private sector and policymakers all have critical roles to play.

- Plastic pollution is a defining environmental challenge for our time.
- In the next 10-15 years global plastic production is projected to nearly double.
- Avoiding the worst of these outcomes demands a complete rethinking of the way we produce, use and manage plastic.
- Individuals are increasingly exercising their power as consumers. People are turning down plastic straws and cutlery, cleaning beaches and coastlines, and reconsidering their purchase habits in supermarket aisles. If this happens enough, retailers will quickly get the message to ask their suppliers to do better.
- While these steps are a cause for celebration, the reality is that individual action alone cannot solve the problem. Even if every one of us does what we can to reduce our plastic footprint – and of course we must – we must also address the problem at its source.
- Consumers must not only be actors but drivers for the behaviour change that must also happen upstream.
- Ultimately, our plastic problem is one of design. Our manufacturing, distribution, consumption and trade systems for plastic – indeed our global economy – need to change.
- The linear model of planned obsolescence, in which items are designed to be thrown away immediately after use, sometimes after just seconds, must end.
- At the heart of this is extended producer responsibility, where manufacturers must be held to account for the entire life-cycle of their consumer products. At the same time, those companies actively embracing their social responsibility should be rewarded for moving to a more circular model of design and production, further incentivizing other companies to do the same.
- Changes to consumer and business practice must be supported and in some cases driven by policy.
- Policymakers and governments worldwide must safeguard precious environmental resources and indeed public health by encouraging sustainable production and consumption through legislation.
- To stem the rising tide of single-use plastics, we need government leadership and in some cases strong intervention.
- Many countries have already taken important steps in this direction.
- The plastic bag bans in place in more than nearly 100 countries prove just how powerful direct government action on plastics can be.



## Calls to Action:

- Governments must lead, enacting strong policies that push for a more circular model of design and production of plastics.  
**This World Environment Day, we're calling on every government to enact robust legislation to curb the production and use of unnecessary single-use plastics.**
- The private sector must innovate, adopting business models that reduce the downstream impact of their products.  
**This World Environment Day, we're calling on every plastic manufacturer to take responsibility for the pollution that their products are causing today, and make immediate investments in sustainable designs for tomorrow.**
- Citizens must act as both consumers and informed citizens, demanding sustainable products and embracing sensible consumption habits in their own lives.  
**This World Environment Day, we're calling on every plastic consumer to exercise their buying power by refusing single-use plastics.**

## Themes:

World Environment Day will seek to influence change in four key areas:

### Reducing Single-Use Plastics

50% of the of consumer plastics are designed to be used only once, providing a momentary convenience before being discarded. Eliminating single-use plastics, both from design chains to our consumer habits is a critical first step to beat plastic pollution.

### Improving Waste Management

Nearly one third of the plastics we use escape our collection systems. Once in the environment, plastics don't go away, they simply get smaller and smaller, last a century or more and increasingly find their way into our food chain. Waste management and recycling schemes are essential to a new plastics economy.

### Phasing Out Microplastics

Recent studies show that over 90% of bottled water and even 83% of tap water contain microplastic particles. No one is sure what that means for human health, but trace amounts are turning up in our blood, stomachs, and lungs with increasing regularity. Humans add to the problem with micro-beads from beauty products and other non-recoverable materials.

### Promoting Research into Alternatives

Alternative solutions to oil-based plastics are limited and difficult to scale. This doesn't need to be the case. Further research is needed to make sustainable plastic alternatives both economically viable and widely available.



## Actions and Resolutions:

This World Environment Day is a culmination of years of effort by Member States aimed at focusing the world's attention and galvanizing action around plastic pollution. UN Environment and its Member States have been developing innovative science and forging new consensus on the complex relationships between plastics, society and the environment for decades. Most recently, the third United Nations Environment Assembly adopted resolution 3/7, which:

1. Stresses the importance of long-term elimination of discharge of litter and microplastics to the oceans and of avoiding detriment to marine ecosystems and the human activities dependent on them from marine litter and microplastics.
2. Urges all actors to step up actions to; “by 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution”.
3. Encourages all member States, based on best available knowledge of sources and levels of marine litter and microplastics in the environment, to prioritize policies and measures at the appropriate scale to avoid marine litter and microplastics from entering the marine environment.

### Further Reading:

2018 Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its third session:  
Towards a pollution-free planet

<https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/k1800398.english.pdf>

2018 UNEA Resolution 3/7: Marine litter and microplastics

<https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/k1800210.english.pdf>

2017 Pollution Report of the Executive Director

<https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/k1708347e.pdf>

2017 General Assembly Resolution 71/312: Our ocean, our future: call for action

[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/312](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/312)

2017 Assessment Combating Marine Plastic Litter and Microplastics: An Assessment of the Effectiveness of Relevant International, Regional and Sub-Regional Governance Strategies and Approaches

[https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/unea-3\\_mpl\\_assessment-2017oct05\\_unedited\\_adjusted.pdf](https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/unea-3_mpl_assessment-2017oct05_unedited_adjusted.pdf)

2016 UNEA Resolution 2/11: Marine plastic litter and microplastics

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/K16/072/28/pdf/K1607228.pdf?OpenElement>

2016 Report: Marine Plastic Debris & Microplastics: Global Lessons and Research to Inspire Action and Guide Policy Change

<https://wedocs.unep.org/rest/bitstreams/11700/retrieve>