

THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ZERO WASTE

2023 WRAP-UP REPORT

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Achieving sustainable and environmentally sound practices of minimizing and managing waste

A LANDMARK IN THE JOURNEY TOWARDS ZERO WASTE

The world celebrated the first annual [International Day of Zero Waste](#) (Zero Waste Day) on 30 March 2023, successfully raising awareness of the need to prevent, reduce and sustainably manage waste.

Facilitated by the [United Nations Environment Programme](#) (UNEP) and the [United Nations Human Settlements Programme](#) (UN-Habitat), Zero Waste Day brought together stakeholders from all sectors to engage in activities that raise awareness of national, subnational, regional and local zero-waste initiatives and their contribution to sustainable development.

Through an extensive outreach and digital campaign executed in eight languages, UNEP and UN-Habitat reached millions and enabled governments, businesses, schools, individuals and more to commit to zero-waste activities through hundreds of registered activities.

Zero Waste Day is established through a UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution in December 2022 that Republic of Türkiye put forward alongside 105 other countries. The Government of Türkiye played a key role in the observance of the Day, with Her Excellency Emine Erdoğan, the First Lady, delivering a [keynote address](#) and [video testimonial](#).

WASTE COMES IN ALL FORMS

Plastics, food, electronics, textiles, extractives, chemicals and more – no matter its form, waste imperils human health, costs the global economy hundreds of billions of dollars a year, and aggravates the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and waste and pollution. Humanity generates an estimated 2.24 billion tons of municipal solid waste annually, which could rise to 3.88 billion tons by 2050 without urgent action.



“Waste contributes to the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution. It’s a threat to health and costs the global economy hundreds of billions of dollars each year.”

Inger Andersen
Executive Director
United Nations Environment Programme



“Waste management is critical to overcoming housing challenges and how we manage our cities’ sanitation challenges and, indeed, the climate crisis. It is central to improving the life of people everywhere.”

Maimunah Mohd Sharif
Executive Director
United Nations Human Settlements Programme

UN CALLS FOR URGENT NEED TO EMBRACE ZERO WASTE

UN Secretary-General António Guterres, UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen and UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif, among other high-level UN dignitaries marked Zero Waste Day by calling for action to bolster sound waste management and shift towards zero waste.

The President of the UNGA convened a [high-level meeting](#) at the UN Headquarters in New York, where Member States and stakeholders exchanged experiences and success stories in solid waste management, including zero-waste initiatives.

“Humanity is treating our planet like a garbage dump. We are trashing our only home,” Mr.

Guterres [said](#) in his address. “It’s time to fight back and launch a war on waste.”

He called for improved design and stronger waste management, the “need to massively invest” in developing and scaling up facilities and policy, and for national zero-waste projects.

Ms. Andersen stressed the “need to act now” across all sectors.

“We have the technical expertise and the drive to innovate. We have the knowledge – both scientific and Indigenous knowledge – to find solutions to the waste crisis,” she said in a [video statement](#).

Ms. Sharif said sound waste management is “central to improving the lives of people everywhere.”

“Waste management is critical to overcoming housing challenges, how we manage our cities’ sanitation challenges and, indeed, the climate crisis,” she added.

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Director-General Qu Dongyu underlined the organization’s commitment to work with all partners to achieve zero waste through addressing “the inefficiencies and inequalities in our agrifood systems.”

WASTE COMES IN ALL FORMS

2.24B

tonnes of municipal solid waste are produced annually

4B

people lack access to controlled disposal facilities

\$70B

can be saved by 2040 with a shift to a circular economy

NEW ADVISORY BOARD ON ZERO WASTE

Pursuant to the UNGA resolution, Mr. Guterres announced the establishment of an Advisory Board of Eminent Persons on Zero Waste. Twice annually over a period of three years, the board will meet to share success stories of

national and local zero-waste initiatives and disseminate best practices.

He named Her Excellency Emine Erdoğan as the board's chairperson, citing her leadership in launching Türkiye's

zero-waste project in 2017. He appointed José Manuel Moller, CEO and Founder of Algramo – a Chilean startup that aims to reduce plastic waste – as vice-chair.

The 13 eminent persons on the board are:

- Guy Ryder: [Under-Secretary-General for Policy](#)
- Her Excellency Emine Erdoğan (chairperson): First Lady of Türkiye
- Mellisa Santokhi-Seenacherry: First Lady of Suriname
- Fatima Bio: First Lady of Sierra Leone
- José Manuel Moller (vice-chair): CEO and founder of [Algramo](#)
- Muhammad Yunus: Co-founder and chairman of [Yunus Environmental Hub](#)
- Carlos Silva Filho: President of [International Solid Waste Association](#)
- Laura Reyes: Executive Director of [Cempre](#)
- Lara van Druten: Chief Executive Officer of [Waste Transformers](#)
- Saleem Ali: Professor at University of Delaware; Honorary Professor at University of Queensland
- Hakima El Haite: Founder of EauGlobe
- Gino Van Begin: Secretary General of [ICLEI](#)
- Vijay Jagannathan: Secretary General of [CityNet Asia Pacific](#)

DIGNITARIES CHAMPION ZERO WASTE AT HIGH-LEVEL MEETING, GLOBAL OBSERVANCE



Her Excellency Emine Erdoğan, the First Lady of Türkiye, delivers the keynote address at the Zero Waste Day high-level meeting. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

In her keynote address at the UNGA high-level meeting, Her Excellency Emine Erdoğan reiterated Türkiye's commitment to advancing zero-waste initiatives.

"We are obliged as humanity to act at once, and together, because we will either win or lose together in this equation," she said. "We are obliged to establish a fair system and take on measures based on burden sharing where we look out for countries deeply impacted by the consequences of climate change which had no part to play in the first place."

Her Excellency Emine Erdoğan added that Türkiye's zero-waste project has conserved some 650 million tonnes of raw material and eliminated 4 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions through recycling since 2017.

"Zero waste has grown over the years – person by person, city by city and region by region – to become a global movement that extends beyond the borders of our country," she said in a [video testimonial](#). "I sincerely believe that this date will mark the beginning of better days for the world, our common home."

Dignitaries from Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, the European Union, Gabon, Georgia, Hungary, Indonesia, Mexico, the Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkmenistan, Türkiye, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Venezuela delivered speeches at the high-level meeting highlighting national efforts to embrace zero waste and calling for greater support for such initiatives.

UNEP and UN-Habitat, alongside the Office of the President of the General Assembly (OPGA) and the Permanent Mission of Türkiye to the UN, marked the [first observance](#) of Zero Waste Day on the margins of the high-level meeting. They provided statements about the myriad issues associated with waste and the environmental, economic and social benefits of transitioning towards zero waste.

László Szőke, the Chef de Cabinet of the OPGA, showcased examples of existing zero-waste initiatives, including Cape Verde and

Brazil's agreement to exchange good practices on solid waste management, Kenyan startups upcycling textile waste, and Pacific and Caribbean Small Island Developing States offering plastic toolkits for the tourism industry.

The Deputy Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan, Myahri Byashimova, called attention to the benefits of zero-waste cities in enabling sustainable development. Ms. Byashimova highlighted the Arkadag, a zero-waste closed-cycle city in south Turkmenistan constructed with a focus on environmentally friendly roads and buildings,

intelligent transportation systems, and electric cars and buses.

Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, Solomon Pavliashvili, shared information about the country's plastic prevention program that employs a circularity approach to waste management. Mr. Pavliashvili also said Georgia supports extended producer responsibility, which requires producers to take responsibility for the life cycle of the products they sell.

MEMBER STATES MAKE COMMITMENTS TO IMPLEMENT ZERO WASTE



The Governments of Kenya and Türkiye released a [joint statement](#) on Zero Waste Day reaffirming their “commitment to working together to achieve zero waste.”

“Political will to achieve zero waste has never been higher, and it is now time to act,” they wrote. “Only by taking bold and decisive action together can we create a healthier and more sustainable and prosperous future for our people and planet.”

They convened an observance in the UN Office at Nairobi to release the statement. The

observance also featured a moderated session with participation from government representatives, UN experts and representatives from various stakeholder groups.

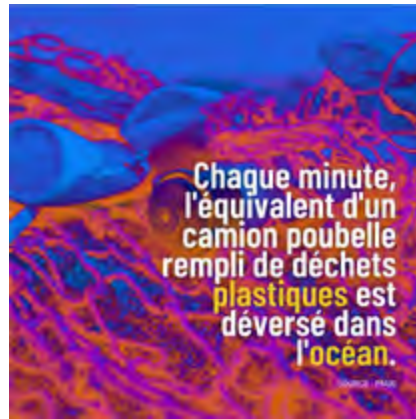
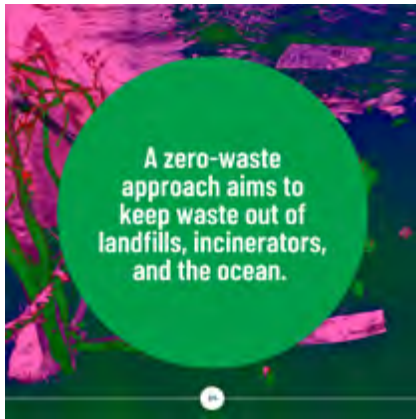
UNEP and UN-Habitat co-organized an event with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs in India, during which Minister Hardeep Singh Puri [declared](#) the country’s target of having at least 1,000 garbage-free cities by October 2024.

The announcement marked the culmination of a three-week women-led [endeavour](#) to promote sustainable

consumption and production, with some 350 delegates from across various stakeholder groups participating.

The Government of Ethiopia, which was among the countries that rallied for the resolution to establish Zero Waste Day, broadcast an interview addressing the country’s waste management policy, efforts, challenges and ambition to move towards zero waste. The Environmental Protection Authority of Ethiopia also announced that it had inaugurated Zero Waste Day in collaboration with local stakeholders.

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS SPUR MOMENTUM



UNEP and UN-Habitat prepared a dedicated outreach campaign, including shareable graphics for social media, in eight languages.

To establish a strong digital presence for Zero Waste Day, UNEP and UN-Habitat designed an appealing brand and visual identity – including official hashtags and evergreen social media assets – in eight languages.

UNEP accounts made a total of 225 posts across all social media platforms, 47 of which were in English. Official posts reached over 2.4 million people and received over 78,000 engagements, which include comments, shares and likes.

UNEP and UN-Habitat prepared a [Public Service Announcement](#) and a [joint statement](#) from their Executive Directors, as well as numerous short video clips for

social media. These received around 488,000 views across all platforms.

Globally, at least 29,500 posts used the official hashtags, while thousands of accounts downloaded and shared the social media assets.

Model, actress and UNEP Goodwill Ambassador [Dia Mirza](#) was among the public figures to share Zero Waste Day material on social media.

Around 33,000 people received the email newsletter highlighting UNEP and UN-Habitat's Zero Waste Day outputs. Hundreds viewed the dedicated hub of [social media assets](#), which contain shareable graphics in

eight languages, as well as key messages, the [marketing brief](#), concept note and more.

The Zero Waste Day [event page](#) on the UN.org website received nearly 30,000 pageviews, while the [event page](#) on the UNEP.org website received over 11,000.

The [One Planet network](#) – a global community of practitioners, policymakers and experts – garnered over 25 per cent more engagement on Twitter than previous months and received over 90,000 page views in March, some 18,000 more than it had in the previous month.

UN EVENTS BRING TOGETHER STAKEHOLDERS



UN events, including the Bangkok office's trip to Chulalongkorn Zero Waste Initiative, showcase existing actions to tackle waste. UNEP

UN agencies and offices from around the world held events to bring stakeholders together and raise awareness of zero waste.

In Bangkok, UNEP and UN-Habitat held an [in-person discussion session](#) that showcased their offices' work to embrace circularity. The session also included a national perspective from Japan and voices from civil society and the business sector on waste reduction and management. After the discussion, UNEP and UN-Habitat, in collaboration with Chulalongkorn University, led a visit to the nearby Chulalongkorn Zero Waste

Initiative, a pioneering initiative raising awareness on sustainable lifestyles that UNEP has partnered with since its launch in 2014. Through the visit, the organizations shared best practices and promote partnerships among educational institutions. The offices also promoted Zero Waste Day at side events during the Asia Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development.

In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), UNEP co-organized a [webinar](#) with the International Solid Waste Association to share its key messages and images, which

190 people attended, including people from the region's public, private and academic sectors. UNEP's LAC Office and its partners also launched the ["Zero Waste in the Caribbean: New Ways, New Waves"](#) project, which aims to better align solid waste management systems in Caribbean countries with circular economy principles.

UNEP's West Asia Office focused on electronic and food waste – two of its key priorities – on Zero Waste Day. It launched its [2050 Electronic and Electrical Waste Outlook in West Asia](#) report and ran a month-long [Sustainable](#)

[Ramadan](#) campaign, which promoted zero-waste recipes and sustainable cooking. UNEP ran its campaign in three Hilton hotels in the region, reducing post-consumer waste by an average of around 63 per cent.

UN-Habitat Pakistan hosted an art competition for schoolchildren between Grades 2 and 9 in the Indus Basin. By engaging youth, UN-Habitat raised awareness about the importance of zero-waste cities and communities, sustainable consumption and production and its role in improvement of human and environmental health. UN-Habitat

hosted a ceremony to celebrate the five winners selected and shared their artwork online.

The UNEP-coordinated Geneva Environment Network (GEN) co-hosted a [virtual conference](#) with UN-Habitat to celebrate the steps stakeholders have taken Geneva and beyond to advance the zero-waste agenda. Experts from across UN agencies, academia, nonprofits and the private sector delivered addresses.

The Executive Director of the Basel Convention Regional

Centre (BCRC) for Asia and the Pacific, Jinhui Li, invited cities worldwide to join the International Network of Zero Waste City Initiative. The network will comprise of member cities, scientific bodies, expert bodies and a subsidiary committee of industry representatives. One of the key principles of the Basel Convention is the reduction of waste generation and the promotion of the management of hazardous waste and other wastes, goals that are closely aligned with zero waste.



Fatima Ayaz
The Prep School



Muhammad Shaheer
City Grammar School,
GT Road Campus



Fatima Javed
City Grammar School,
GT Road Campus



Mahad Ahmed
City Grammar School,
GT Road Campus



Izma Faraz
City Grammar School,
GT Road Campus

Winning entries of UN-Habitat's art competition for schoolchildren in Grades 2–9 in Pakistan. UN-Habitat Pakistan

STAKEHOLDERS SHARE EXPERIENCES, URGE FOR GREATER COLLABORATION

At the GEN conference, John Xavier Chweya, the Chairman of the Kenya National Waste Pickers Welfare Association, described the inequalities that waste pickers and those employed in the informal waste management industry face. Estimates show that the informal sector is responsible for [58 per cent](#) of all the plastic waste collected and recovered globally, highlighting the key role these groups play.

“Waste is generally a global war,” he said. “Waste pickers are at the forefront of this war because they have the historic knowledge and depth in managing this waste.”

Warefta E. Murshed, a graduate researcher from the Royal University of Bhutan, stressed the importance of women and youth in leading decisive action to manage waste. She highlighted a project in Bhutan that upcycles plastic waste into construction materials while involving youth and women and providing training. The project, which aims to expand to Bangladesh and Nepal, also involves visits to local schools to educate children and youth about sound waste management.

“Especially in developing countries, women are often managing households, and

knowingly or unknowingly, they are segregating waste, both in industries like the garment industry in Bangladesh and at the household level. Despite their involvement, women often lack capacity building, proper assistance, and most importantly, safeguards for their work in the waste sector,” Ms. Murshed said. “We need more support for the voluntary work women and children are doing in the waste management sector. Women who work in this field see it as a money-making opportunity, earning only a minimal wage of two dollars per day. Youth often earn even less.”

STAKEHOLDERS SHARE BEST PRACTICES

The One Planet network launched a two-week campaign to mark Zero Waste Day. Around 350 new members joined the network in that span, and it

received 14 new submissions to its [database](#) of the best resources about sustainable production and consumption. These submissions include

managing food waste in London, England, land-use planning globally, infrastructure financing in Australia and more.

TOURISM TOOLKIT: TORRES DEL PAINE, CHILE

Local organization Fundacion Lenga submitted a toolkit focusing on hostels and tour operators based in Puerto Natales, Torres del Paine. The toolkit is the first to focus on the problem of waste in the region, where tourism is one of the industries that is supposed to preserve the environment. Torres del Paine, a national park in southern Chilean Patagonia, is a popular tourist and hiking destination that hosts over 250,000 visitors per year.

The Tourism Toolkit includes a podcast and interview, a zero-waste tourism guide and brochure focused on local options for zero waste – such as where to buy in bulk, repair, compost and more – zero-waste commitment templates for businesses, and social media posts.

STORIES HIGHLIGHT UNIQUE EXPERIENCES

UNEP and UN-Habitat produced a [feature story](#) to explain the concept and importance of zero waste, highlight existing initiatives, evaluate challenges and inspire action. The story involved collaboration with regional offices from around the world.

The organizations' national offices in India liaised with local partners and stakeholders to enable the feature to spotlight the work of Indore, billed India's cleanest city for six years in a row. The city's education and training systems, robust household composting initiatives, financing, technologically advanced processing plants and more are key enabling factors of zero waste. An interview with a managerial consultant working with the city provided context and added detail on the societal benefits of zero-waste wards and cities.

The feature also highlights a UNEP-led zero-waste project, funded by the Global Environment Facility, that has driven political action and groundbreaking legislation in Nigeria. By highlighting this, the feature draws greater attention to electronic waste and the informal waste processing industry, a key cog in global economies that often presents risk to those it employs.

UNEP and UN-Habitat projects from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, Viet Nam, Lebanon, Tanzania, Chile, Türkiye and across Africa are also highlighted, informing readers of the wide and diverse scope of zero-waste initiatives.

UNEP and UN-Habitat also jointly issued a [press release](#).

EXTERNAL ACTIVITY REGISTRATIONS DRIVE IMPACT

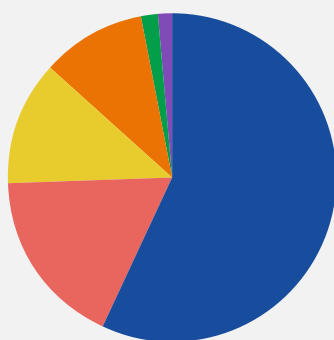
Through outreach channels and regional offices, UNEP and UN-Habitat invited individuals, schools, organizations, governments and other stakeholders to register activities for Zero Waste Day.

Nearly 250 activities were submitted, with Brazil, Italy, Morocco and Tunisia registering the most.

These activities included conferences, training modules, school campaigns, waste

collection drives, fashion shows and art competitions. They all helped to raise awareness of the importance of responsible consumption and production practices and urban waste management across a wide demographic range.

REGISTERED ACTIVITIES BY REGION



[Zero Waste Europe](#) played an important role in driving engagement for Zero Waste Day by engaging its network of 35 local and national NGOs from around the continent and running a social media campaign.

[Zero Waste Italy](#) hosted a number of events across the country, including a seminar in Sicily and a press release and video calling for the ban of

single-use plastic packaging in schools. It also produced a [map](#) tracking 133 reuse centres, 24 repair centres and 10 that deal with upcycling projects across the country. This tool aims to inform citizens and build networks between these centres, which can lead to synergy and partnerships.

In Nice, France, arts organization New Planet completed a fashion show and

photoshoot of upcycled dresses and clothing made from plastic waste, including bottles, cigarettes, coffee capsules and face masks. New Planet released a [video](#) to explain how each of its designs connects to a different aspect of plastic pollution, and how each form of waste impacts the environment and human health.



From school recycling drives in Morocco to fashion shows in France, stakeholders celebrated Zero Waste Day in myriad ways. New Planet, Essalah Essalah

The [Madison Square Park Conservancy](#) in New York hosted interactive activities focused on reuse, donation, recycling and composting from the city's waste experts. It also collected food scraps and electronics for recycling.

The support of government bodies – from the Ministry of National Education, Preschool and Sports in Morocco to the State Department of Education of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil – greatly helped expand the reach of Zero Waste Day. Government bodies successfully engaged

more stakeholders, including many primary and secondary schools, to register their events. Strengthened collaboration with governments, academia and the private sector can further bolster the reach of Zero Waste Day in the future.

PREPARING FOR 2024 AND BEYOND

With millions reached, news coverage from over 500 media outlets, nearly 250 external stakeholders registering activities and numerous in-depth conferences dedicated to zero waste, UNEP and UN-Habitat consider the first annual celebration a success.

UNEP and UN-Habitat facilitated this year's observance on short notice. With more time to prepare, the organizations will provide a more in-depth strategic approach to the Day and better coordinate next year's observance.

Building upon this year's social media assets, the 2024

observance can engage a greater number of stakeholders across more regions. UNEP and UN-Habitat can also prepare more in-person and online events that feature a greater diversity of stakeholders who can highlight successes and challenges in zero waste. Selecting a theme for each year's event may also help focus

on areas of waste management that may need greater attention in the coming years.

UNEP, as the global authority that sets the environmental agenda, is well-positioned to continue guiding the shift to zero waste through its regional and global programmes, which address all forms of waste across their entire lifecycles. The expertise of the [International Environmental](#)

[Technology Centre](#) and the [Life Cycle Initiative](#) can help inform best practices. The One Planet network has a [database](#) of the best resources about sustainable production and consumption.

UN-Habitat is the focal point for all urbanization and human settlement matters in the United Nations, guiding cities towards sustainable urbanization, including addressing and

improving their municipal solid waste management. It is well-positioned to provide the expertise needed to help cities incorporate zero waste into waste management strategies, including through [Waste Wise Cities](#) and the [African Clean Cities Platform](#). It offers [data and monitoring, sharing of knowledge](#), advocacy and education, and support for tangible project development.

#BeatWastePollution

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