

From the Desk of the Patron....

1. World Environment Day 2025: A Rallying Cry to End Plastic Pollution Theme: “Ending Plastic Pollution”

Prologue

Each year, World Environment Day reminds us of our shared duty to safeguard the Earth, our only home. On June 5, 2025, the global community gathered once again, this time to confront a mounting environmental emergency: plastic pollution. **This year’s theme is a clarion call to individuals, industries, and governments alike to phase out unnecessary plastic use and to urgently pursue sustainable alternatives.** Plastic pollution has evolved into a full-blown planetary crisis. Over 400 million tonnes of plastic are produced globally each year, with nearly half intended for single-use. Alarmingly, only about 9% of all plastic ever produced has been recycled. The rest accumulates in landfills, clogs waterways, and contaminates our oceans—or is incinerated, emitting harmful greenhouse gases and toxic chemicals. The damage is pervasive: marine creatures ingest or become entangled in plastic waste, microplastics infiltrate food chains and even human organs, and entire ecosystems are thrown into disarray. Less visible, yet equally grave, is the climate footprint of plastics. Being fossil fuel-based, plastics emit large amounts of CO₂ and methane during production and disposal, exacerbating global warming.

Brief Elucidation

Recent years have witnessed a surge in environmental awareness, backed by growing scientific evidence and a wave of grassroots activism. Many nations have introduced bans on single-use plastics, while businesses and innovators explore biodegradable materials, circular economy practices, and more effective waste management systems. However, progress remains slow and uneven.

This year, World Environment Day 2025, spearheaded by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), aims to galvanize action on a global scale. The campaign urges countries to adopt legally binding measures, promote international cooperation, and enforce policies that curb plastic production and pollution. It also calls upon corporations to redesign products, reduce packaging, and invest in sustainable logistics, while encouraging consumers to shift toward mindful, low-impact lifestyles.

From Pollution to Solutions

Addressing the pervasive issue of plastic pollution requires more than symbolic gestures. It calls for a comprehensive and coordinated national transformation in the way plastic is produced, consumed, and disposed of. Eliminating disposable plastic items such as cutlery, straws, and unnecessary packaging must be prioritized through enforceable bans. A shift toward a circular economy is essential, where products are designed with reusability and recyclability in mind, significantly reducing reliance on virgin plastic. Concurrently, it is imperative to modernize waste management systems, particularly in underserved and rural regions, to ensure effective collection, segregation, and recycling of plastic waste. Innovation must be fostered through sustained support for the research and development of biodegradable and compostable alternatives, including materials derived from agricultural residues and natural fibers. Equally important is the role of public engagement; creating widespread environmental awareness and involving youth and communities in long-term stewardship initiatives is critical to changing consumption patterns and instilling sustainable values.

In the above context, the undersigned Applicant (myself) respectfully prays before the Hon’ble National Green Tribunal to consider directing a structured and equitable phase-out of single-use plastic (SUP) manufacturing units, particularly those operating without requisite approvals or in violation of environmental norms. It is further prayed that such a phase out be implemented over a transitional period of 6 to 12 months, accompanied by regulatory and financial support mechanisms to incentivize and facilitate a shift towards eco-friendly and sustainable alternatives. There is an urgent need to subsidize the production and marketing of sustainable substitutes such as palm leaf tableware, bagasse packaging, bamboo goods, and cornstarch-based biodegradable plastics. A Green Label Certification scheme should be instituted to recognize environmentally compliant producers, with public procurement mandates favoring certified products in government departments, PSUs, and public functions. To ensure a just transition, re-skilling programs must be

launched for workers displaced from the plastic industry, while women-led Self-Help Groups and rural artisans should be supported to take up green livelihoods through technical training and targeted subsidies. Further, tax relief in the form of GST reductions and startup grants for entrepreneurs developing sustainable packaging solutions would encourage innovation and investment in the green economy. A national task force should be constituted to monitor the phase-out process, ensure compliance, and track the growth of alternative materials, while dedicated funding for research institutions must be ensured to develop cost-effective biodegradable solutions.

Accordingly, the Applicant respectfully requests that the Hon'ble Tribunal may be pleased to issue appropriate directions to the concerned ministries including the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), and Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade

(DPIIT)—to jointly formulate and notify a National Roadmap for the Transition from Single-Use Plastics. This roadmap should prioritize inclusive and sustainable solutions, provide institutional support to MSMEs, and ensure that environmental, economic, and social objectives are harmoniously achieved.

India's Role and Responsibility

As one of the world's most populous nations and a major consumer of plastic, India holds a pivotal role in the global fight against plastic pollution. The country's 2022 ban on select single use plastics marked a commendable step in the right direction. In parallel, numerous indigenous startups and research institutions have emerged at the forefront of developing eco-friendly alternatives. To ensure lasting impact, this transition must now be accelerated and expanded to a national scale, effectively curbing the widespread use of single-use plastics and promoting sustainable consumption practices.

Several Indian cities and areas are making strides towards being plastic-free, with some achieving success through community-led initiatives and government policies. Kannur district being a prominent example of

India's first plastic-free district. Kannur district in Kerala, India has successfully fought against plastic pollution and was declared India's first plastic-free district in April 2017. The district phased out single-use plastic and prohibited its sale and purchase, even requiring permissions for disposable items during public gatherings. Heavy monitoring of dumping activities took place along roadsides and water bodies. Mysuru, Udaipur, Amritsar, and Jaipur. Indore, Surat, and Thiruvananthapuram are good examples of striding for plastic free environment. Yet, with committed leadership, community participation, and clear alternatives, more places can follow the path of Kannur. It's not a lack of possibility but a matter of priority and persistent action.

However, policy enforcement remains inconsistent, and public awareness is still evolving. To make real progress, India must reinforce regulatory frameworks, incentivize green businesses, and integrate plastic awareness into school curricula, media outreach, and community programs. Initiatives like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan can be reimagined to include targeted campaigns against plastic waste. Moreover, India's age-old values of reuse, repair, and simplicity can be leveraged to promote sustainable living at scale.

Epilogue

World Environment Day is more than a symbolic date. It is a global call to action. **Governments must legislate with resolve, businesses must lead with responsibility, and individuals must act with conscience.** Small everyday choices carrying a reusable bag, saying no to bottled water, supporting zero-waste stores can cumulatively create monumental impact.

Let us not underestimate the power of united effort. If we act together across sectors and borders. It is possible to envision a world where plastic waste is no longer a threat, but a well-managed resource of the past. **Ending plastic pollution is not a choice. It is a necessity.** The clock is ticking, and the cost of inaction is too great. On this World Environment Day, let us renew our commitment to a plastic-free planet and work collectively toward a cleaner, greener, and more resilient future for all.

2. Echoes of Exploitation: Environmental Injustice from Global North to South

Prologue

In an era marked by climate breakdown, ecological degradation, and growing environmental inequality, the divide between the Global North and Global South has become increasingly difficult to ignore. **Sofia Irfan's article, published on April 20, 2021, via Medium, delivers a compelling critique of how wealthy, industrialized nations have continued to externalize the costs of environmental harm onto less-developed regions.** Through incisive analysis, she sheds light on the exploitative patterns of waste exportation, carbon emissions, and natural resource extraction that place disproportionate burdens on the Global South, all while allowing the Global North to maintain its consumption-driven lifestyles with minimal accountability. This review aims to deepen global awareness of these injustices and provoke critical reflection on the structural imbalances at the heart of our environmental crises. It further invites readers particularly those in positions of influence or privilege to consider meaningful actions, policy changes, and forms of international cooperation that move beyond symbolic gestures toward real environmental justice. **By amplifying these concerns, this review contributes to a broader dialogue on shared responsibility, ethical climate finance, and the urgent need for systemic change in global environmental governance.**

Brief Elucidation

The Global North comprising the world's wealthiest and most industrialized nations is overwhelmingly responsible for both historical carbon emissions and plastic waste generation. The United States alone accounts for 40% of excess global CO₂ emissions, while the European Union contributes an additional 29%. Altogether, the Global North is responsible for an estimated 92% of cumulative emissions.

The disparity is just as stark when it comes to waste. Countries like the United States, Denmark, and New Zealand generate more than twice as much waste per capita as nations in the Global South. **Much of this waste is shipped abroad under the label of "recyclables" not to genuinely promote recycling, but to avoid the costs and environmental scrutiny of domestic disposal.**

On the receiving end, countries such as Malaysia are overwhelmed by imported waste,

much of which is contaminated or non-recyclable. This waste often ends up in illegal processing sites, where it is burned or dumped in rivers and landfills leading to severe environmental degradation and serious public health threats. But this is more than just a waste crisis. It is a continuation of a deeply unjust global system rooted in historical exploitation. **Industrialized nations not only extracted raw materials and labour from the Global South to build their own wealth, but have also overdrawn from the shared atmospheric commons accelerating climate change that disproportionately harms poorer, more vulnerable populations.**

Climate change does not respect borders. While emissions anywhere affect the global climate system, it is low-income nations that bear the brunt facing rising sea levels, extreme weather events, biodiversity loss, and collapsing food systems despite contributing the least to the problem. According to the United Nations, developing countries will need \$500 billion annually by 2050 to adapt to and mitigate climate change. Given that the U.S. and EU are responsible for over 90% of historical emissions, shouldn't they bear a proportionate share of that cost? This is not simply an economic issue. It is a question of fairness, responsibility, and environmental justice.

The global waste crisis intensified after China implemented a ban on foreign waste imports in 2016, having previously processed nearly half of the world's plastic, metal, and paper waste. This shift forced waste-exporting countries, particularly in the Global North, to divert their shipments to Southeast Asian nations with weaker environmental regulations. The result has been widespread environmental and public health disasters, including polluted waterways, agricultural disruption, and rising cases of respiratory illness. In regions like Java, waste dumped near homes and farmlands contaminates soil and water, while coastal areas in Indonesia struggle with severe marine pollution that threatens biodiversity and human food chains.

The United Nations has warned that nature is degrading at an unprecedented pace, placing over a million species at risk of extinction. These ecological disruptions also jeopardize food security through soil erosion, ecosystem collapse, and the looming threat of famine. Yet, despite these consequences, the United States, the world's largest producer of plastic

waste has failed to support key international efforts to address the crisis. Specifically, it did not ratify the 2021 amendments to the Basel Convention, which strengthened global controls on hazardous plastic waste and banned certain exports outright. Instead, U.S. plastic waste exports to countries with weaker restrictions, particularly in Southeast Asia and Mexico, increased by 32% after the amendments took effect.

The burden on nations like Malaysia, Vietnam, and the Philippines has grown significantly. Activists such as Jane Dell of The Last Beach Cleanup have criticized the U.S. for deflecting blame onto importing countries, while continuing to export its waste and failing to tackle root problems such as overproduction, single-use plastics, and corporate accountability. Legislation like the Save Our Seas 2.0 Act, signed into law by former President Donald Trump, has been widely criticized as inadequate. It does little to curb production or hold manufacturers accountable, and continues to allow the outsourcing of waste disposal to unethical or illegal operations abroad.

Environmental justice organizations like GAIA argue that it is fundamentally unjust for poorer nations to bear the environmental costs of waste generated by wealthier countries. They call for both accountability

and the repatriation of exported waste. Preventing plastic pollution at the source is essential; relying on national import bans has only led to redirection of waste, with Africa increasingly at risk of becoming the next dumping ground if Asia closes its ports. Recycling alone cannot solve the crisis. What's required is systemic change: robust international regulation, modern waste infrastructure, and product designs that enable closed-loop production and consumption.

Epilogue

Expecting low-income countries to manage mountains of foreign, often illegal and non-recyclable plastic on top of their own waste is both inequitable and environmentally destructive. The Global North must acknowledge and take full responsibility for the ecological consequences of its consumption and production patterns. **Continuing to externalize environmental harm not only perpetuates global injustice but also accelerates climate and ecological breakdowns that threaten all nations, regardless of wealth.** The window for action is closing rapidly. **Collective, coordinated, and urgent efforts are now imperative to prevent irreversible damage.**

Compilation and revamping

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