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IPEN and GAIA Intervention on Household Waste

Given by Dharmesh Shah

Thank You Mr. and Madam Co-Chairs

On behalf of IPEN, GAIA and affiliated civil society groups, I thank you for giving me an opportunity to present on the important issue of household waste management. As we speak, around 3.5 million tons of waste has made its way into the world's oceans, landfills and incinerators. If business is carried on as usual, the world's nations will have to deal with 11 million tons of waste by the year 2100. This is not a world we want to leave behind for our future generations.

In this context, we welcome the proposal of setting up a Household Waste Partnership as adopted at the 13th Conference of Parties to the Basel Convention. We believe, that in principle, such a partnership can help support global waste minimization efforts, encourage clean production and shift our societies away from a linear pathway and towards a circular economy.

Our vision of a circular economy is one where all materials are seen as resources to be reused, recycled or repaired, if not, redesigned. And where the need for expensive and unsustainable waste

disposal options like incinerators and landfills is eliminated. Policies and technology innovations are geared towards maximizing recyclability and elimination of toxic substances in products that poison the Circular Economy. Our vision for cities includes jobs, clean air, and cost savings.

Waste is a social issue: good governance and public policy should be a driver for change rather than technology alone.

Our experience shows that when communities have joined forces, sustainable solutions have emerged from the most unexpected quarters. For instance, more than 2000 waste pickers in the Indian city of Pune have come together as a cooperative to exert their right of access to recyclables. What resulted was a win-win deal for the citizens, government and the workers who now share the benefits of a progressive waste management system that respects workers dignity, protects the environment and saves tax money. Taiwan became one of the few global cities to have decoupled waste generation rates from GDP through innovative waste materials management policies. Waste generation in Taiwan dropped from 8.7 to 7.95 million tons between 2000 and 2010, despite a 47 percent increase in GDP in the same period. More than 350 municipalities in Europe have committed to zero waste goals by reducing their dependence on landfills and incinerators. Leading the efforts is the municipality of Flanders, Belgium, where the per capita waste generation has held steady since 2000, showing a rare example of economic growth without increased waste generation. As we speak, more cities are moving their resources and focus toward zero waste systems to create jobs, clean air, and cost

savings. These best practices need to be shared with more cities and more countries, as quickly as possible.

I would like to conclude by reiterating the support of the civil society to the formation of the Household Waste Partnership under the Basel Convention. We hope that such an initiative will uphold good science, espouse best available practices, ensure public participation and usher us towards a Circular Economy that is free of toxics.