

'END WASTE' CHARTER

PRINCIPLES FOR SOLVING THE WASTE CRISIS IN MONGOLIA

MARCH 2023

*We, the undersigned, agree on the following key principles to set a horizon and frame all our actions to solve **the waste crisis in Mongolia**:*

1. WE STRIVE TO MAKE OUR **LIFESTYLES SUSTAINABLE** AND OUR **ECONOMY CIRCULAR** AGAIN
2. WE HOLD **SOCIAL JUSTICE** AS A MORAL COMPASS
3. WE SEE THAT SOLVING THE WASTE CRISIS REQUIRES **RELOCATING PART OF THE ECONOMY**
4. WE SEARCH FOR **SOLUTIONS** THAT ARE **BROADLY ACCESSIBLE** AND **SYSTEMATICALLY SCALABLE**
5. WE STRIVE TO DESIGN **SOLUTIONS ADAPTED TO LOCAL CONTEXTS**
6. WE SEE MANDATORY '**EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY**' AS THE KEY TO SOLVE THE WASTE CRISIS
7. WE CONSIDER THAT **COMPREHENSIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT** SHOULD BE A **PUBLIC SERVICE**
8. WE ALWAYS KEEP THE **REDUCTION OF WASTE PRODUCTION** AS OUR PARAMOUNT GOAL
9. WE KNOW THAT **RECYCLING IS ESSENTIAL** BUT **NOT A MAGICAL SOLUTION** TO EVERYTHING
10. WE MAKE A **DIFFERENCE** BETWEEN '**RECYCLING**' AND '**DOWNCYCLING**'
11. WE **REFUSE WASTE INCINERATION** UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES
12. WE TRY TO RETURN **ORGANIC WASTE TO THE SOIL**
13. WE REMEMBER THAT **HOUSEHOLD WASTE SORTING** IS ESSENTIAL BUT **NOT ENOUGH**
14. WE CALL AUTHORITIES TO STRICTLY **BAN DISPOSABLE ITEMS**
15. WE BELIEVE THAT **PACKAGING SHOULD BE STANDARDIZED** AND **TAKEN BACK**
16. WE CALL FOR A LEGALLY **BINDING GLOBAL TREATY** TO END PLASTIC POLLUTION

Each of these principles is explained and detailed in the following three pages of this Charter

Organization:

Name of signatory:

Position of signatory:

Date:

Signature:



'END WASTE' CHARTER

PRINCIPLES FOR SOLVING THE WASTE CRISIS IN MONGOLIA

MARCH 2023

The following **16 points** of this Charter are key principles intended to set a horizon and frame all actions that are carried out to solve the waste crisis in Mongolia. Signatories pledge to promote and respect these principles to the best of their abilities.

1

WE STRIVE TO MAKE OUR LIFESTYLES SUSTAINABLE AND OUR ECONOMY CIRCULAR AGAIN

Our fight to solve the waste crisis is included into a broader fight to (re)make our lifestyles ethical and sustainable. There is no sustainable solution to the waste crisis if we are not willing to question our economic system based on ever-growing production and consumption. Long-term solutions are relevant only if they contribute to closing the loop of the circular economy and decrease the overall pressure on the ecosystems and natural resources. Solutions that reduce problems on one side while creating problems on another are not real solutions.

2

WE HOLD SOCIAL JUSTICE AS A MORAL COMPASS

The solutions that we implement to solve the waste crisis should not only have a positive impact on the environment, it should also benefit the people, strengthen social justice and empower local communities. The actions we carry out should never lead to increase the burden on the people, especially the most vulnerable. On the contrary, our solutions should prioritize the rights of the people most affected by waste, and create sustainable, decent jobs within the concerned communities.

3

WE SEE THAT SOLVING THE WASTE CRISIS REQUIRES RELOCATING PART OF THE ECONOMY

Intensifying worldwide trade over the past decades require more and more packaging as the length of supply chains and the duration between production and consumption increased dramatically. Relocating the economy as much as possible, to reconnect local producers with local consumers, is necessary to decrease waste production altogether. That is why protecting and recreating local jobs within the communities is important not only from an ethical standpoint, but also to solving the waste crisis.

4

WE SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS THAT ARE BROADLY ACCESSIBLE AND SYSTEMATICALLY SCALABLE

Real solutions should benefit everyone regardless of where they live or how much money they have. New technologies that are accessible only to a wealthy elite are not good solutions, especially if they lead to destroying existing or possible jobs for people in need. Likewise, solutions that are implementable only in few places, or that are too expensive to implement and/or scale up should not be considered as comprehensive solutions.

5

WE STRIVE TO DESIGN SOLUTIONS ADAPTED TO LOCAL CONTEXTS

As we acknowledge that waste management systems are not perfect anywhere in the world and that the waste management systems set up in the most advanced countries in most cases still rely on externalizing costs and/or workload to poorer countries and/or communities, we refuse to blindly adopt so-called 'best practices' from these countries. We strive to assess each option in the light of our vision and principles, and implement the most relevant locally. We are not afraid to be innovative and design radical solutions if it is necessary.



6

WE SEE MANDATORY 'EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY' AS THE KEY TO SOLVE THE WASTE CRISIS

Companies that produce or market the products and packaging that end up constituting our waste should be effectively responsible for managing this waste. As such, 'Extended Producer Responsibility' (EPR) rules must be defined by policy-makers, with mandatory obligations rather than voluntary plans and pledges from corporations. Strict binding laws and policies should emphasize that the responsibility of these large companies include not only the end of life of their products and packaging (when they become waste) but their full life cycle costs and impacts. Upstream, producers should design more sustainable products and packaging which can be effectively repaired, reused, or recycled and are free of toxic substances; downstream, they should have active and significant logistical and financial participation to establish adequate waste management systems in all locations.

7

WE CONSIDER THAT COMPREHENSIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT SHOULD BE A PUBLIC SERVICE

Having access to a clean and healthy environment is a fundamental human right. As such, waste management should be considered, out of principle, as a basic public service just like health and education systems. Although it is possible to create profitable businesses out of some specific types of waste and specific segments of the waste management chain, waste management as whole implies much more expenses than incomes, which is why business entities are not fit to sustainably set up an economically viable, comprehensive waste management system. Thus, even if part of the waste management chain can be operated by the private sector, public policies and administrations must drive the core waste management systems, with the general interest in mind.

8

WE ALWAYS KEEP THE REDUCTION OF WASTE PRODUCTION AS OUR PARAMOUNT GOAL

In line with the 3R principle, all our activities must tend to reducing waste production at the source. The relevance of each activity is systematically assessed under the prism of waste reduction to avoid actions that have the counter-productive effect of maintaining or even increasing waste production. In other words, we must not be looking for better ways to reuse or recycle waste that should not even exist in the first place – we must simply make unnecessary waste disappear.

9

WE KNOW THAT RECYCLING IS ESSENTIAL BUT NOT A MAGICAL SOLUTION TO EVERYTHING

Although recycling obviously has an important role to play in solving the waste crisis, we should also recognize its inherent limits and problems, which make recycling irrelevant and inapplicable in many cases. Worldwide, the recycling sector is essentially failing and relies intrinsically on social inequalities and exploitation of vulnerable communities. Infinite 100% recycling is merely a myth and it is only part of the solution: putting too much emphasis on recycling comes with important counter-productive effects that we must beware of. Recyclers are not magicians who can solve the waste crisis alone: they deserve adequate waste management systems that enable them to do their relevant part efficiently.

10

WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 'RECYCLING' AND 'DOWNCYCLING'

Although there is no official definition of 'recycling' and 'downcycling,' effective recycling is intended as a recycling process that produces very little or no waste, and aims to recreate the same type of item (e.g., a broken glass bottle is recycled into a new glass bottle). On the contrary, downcycling refers to processes that produce a significant amount of waste and/or that turn alleged recyclable waste into a lower-grade item (e.g., PET bottles are often downcycled into clothes or carpets that will quickly end up in a dumpsite or incinerator). While true recycling contributes to closing the loop of the circular economy, downcycling does not: it only adds intermediary stages to the linear production-consumption-disposal chain. The solutions we implement must reflect this essential difference, and we should not accept misleading uses of the words "recycling," "recyclable" or "recycled." We must help professional recyclers to truly recycle, not just downcycle.



11

WE REFUSE WASTE INCINERATION UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES

It is scientifically proven that waste incineration, including “waste-to-energy” technologies, create as many problems as they solve. Incineration emits substances that are extremely toxic for human health, and have terrible impacts on ecosystems and the climate. Incineration not only disincentivizes reduction of waste generation (incinerators require lots of waste to be economically viable) but it also competes with local recyclers (incinerators specifically need a lot of plastic to burn well, which disincentivizes sorting and recycling). Waste-to-energy facilities are extremely expensive, in terms of both upfront investments and running costs: it is one of the most expensive – and one of the least efficient – ways to produce electricity. We do not see any compelling evidence that existing waste incineration practices can offer appropriate solutions for the waste crisis in Mongolia.

12

WE TRY TO RETURN ORGANIC WASTE TO THE SOIL

Organic ‘waste’ has reason to be in a dumpsite, it should return to the soil to fertilize it. As vegetal and animal food waste constitute a significant part of our daily waste, we must actively encourage and implement composting and other forms of natural organic waste processing. Incidentally, as the core principle of dry toilets, composting is a great solution to avoid health and environmental problems associated with pit latrines.

13

WE REMEMBER THAT HOUSEHOLD WASTE SORTING IS ESSENTIAL BUT NOT ENOUGH

Household waste actually represents only a small part of all waste. Therefore, although citizens’ good habits and proper at-home sorting are important and should be encouraged, we must always remember that the main problem lies upstream at the production level: on average, for one container of waste we produce at home, at least 70 more containers of waste were produced beforehand by the industries from which we bought our products.

14

WE CALL AUTHORITIES TO STRICTLY BAN DISPOSABLE ITEMS

With a view to reducing waste, and most importantly to preserving resources, it is of paramount importance to urgently halt the use of disposable products, meaning both single-use items (such as packaging) and products designed for a too short lifespan (clothing, furniture, equipment...). Through purchasing decisions, individuals can send signals to economic actors, but this is not enough: in the absence of clear policies that progressively forbid disposable products, individual actions have only limited effects. Political decision makers need to make a stand and adopt relevant audacious legislations.

15

WE BELIEVE THAT PACKAGING SHOULD BE STANDARDIZED AND TAKEN BACK

Whether they are reused or recycled, all types of packaging should be standardized as much as possible to simplify the waste management chain and increase the economic viability of reusing and recycling processes while decreasing the ecological impacts. In any case, companies should be obligated to favor reusable packaging and (re)organize a systematic take-back scheme for all their packaging waste (regardless of its condition) instead of relying on the good will of other stakeholders.

16

WE CALL FOR A LEGALLY BINDING GLOBAL TREATY TO END PLASTIC POLLUTION

In March 2022, the UN Environmental Assembly agreed upon a historic mandate to negotiate a legally binding treaty addressing the full life cycle of plastics, from production to disposal. We call the Mongolian government to take an active part in this international negotiation, and to consider each principle of this Charter to promote actual good solutions instead of false solutions that are defended by polluters. If all countries agree on signing a binding treaty, it will be a big step towards solving the waste crisis.



For more information about this Charter and the principles, please contact Ecosoum at

contact@ecosoum.org