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20 February 2018

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UK, Israel Reduce Plastic Pollution, the Theme of World Environment Day



UN Photo/Martine Perret

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Israel has reduced its use of plastic bags by 80%, following the introduction of a law that requires supermarkets to charge customers for plastic bags.
- The UK has taken five steps to reduce its plastic pollution.
- UNEP announced that 'Beat Plastic Pollution' will be the theme for World Environment Day 2018.

19 February: As the UN Environment Programme (UNEP, or UN Environment) announced that the theme for World Environment Day will be 'Beat Plastic Pollution,' the UK and Israel have taken steps to reduce their country's use of plastic and fight pollution in the world's oceans. Recent actions include banning microbeads, phasing out the use of plastic straws and reducing the use of plastic bags.

These actions will support progress on the Sustainable Development Goal on life below water (SDG 14), particularly SDG target 14.1, which aims to, by 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution. SDG 12 (sustainable consumption and production) also includes targets focused on reducing waste generation and encouraging sustainable practices.

The UK has taken five steps to tackle plastic pollution, according to UNEP. First, a government ban on plastic microbeads, which prevents the use of microbeads in cleaning products and cosmetics, took effect. Canada, Ireland and the US have passed similar laws on microbeads. Second, several UK restaurants have agreed to phase out the use of non-biodegradable drinking straws in 2018, including several chain restaurants. Third, Scotland has announced a countrywide ban on straws and on the sale and manufacture of plastic cotton buds. Fourth, several supermarket chains are working to eliminate plastic packaging. The supermarket chain 'Iceland' has announced it will introduce paper and pulp food containers and paper bags to eliminate plastic packaging in all its branded products. Aldi UK and Tesco have announced similar plans. Finally, Buckingham Palace is phasing out the use of disposable plastic at royal estates by eliminating the use of plastic bottles and straws in public and private dining areas and introducing biodegradable takeaway containers.

Israel has reported that the amount of bag waste found in its oceans has been cut in half and the country has reduced its use of plastic bags by 80%, following the introduction of a law that requires supermarkets to charge customers a minimum of US\$0.03 per plastic bag. In addition, Israel's law requires supermarkets to display the cost of the bags on the customer's bill and stores must report the number of bags distributed to the government. The funds generated from bag sales go to Israel's Ministry of Environmental Protection's Maintenance of Cleanliness Fund, which uses the money to support air pollution reduction projects, support manufacturers to adjust their operations and comply with legislation, and raise awareness about the law.

Israel's Minister of Environmental Protection, MK Zeev Elkin, compared the 80% reduction in plastic bag consumption with international standards. He explained Israel achieved the reduction in less than one year while the EU aims to reduce its consumption by 80% over a five-year time period. According to UNEP, the average household uses 1,200 bags per year. Israelis use 325 bags per year, on average.

In March 2018, India's Maharashtra state will implement a ban on most non-reusable plastics. The ban will include single-use plastic bags, disposable containers and utensils, banners and flex bags. The Maharashtra government will raise awareness on the ban through an awareness campaign that aims to ensure people are prepared for the law. To increase the ban's chance of success, the government is offering financial incentives to villages and municipalities that tackle plastic pollution. Maharashtra is India's second most-populous state and includes Mumbai, India's biggest city. India is also hosting the 2018 World Environment Day.

In an infographic for World Environment Day 2018, UNEP states that 50% of plastic is single-use, and plastic makes up 10% of all generated waste. In 2016, 480 billion drinking water bottles were sold around the world, with 17 million barrels of oil used to produce plastic water bottles annually. Each year, up to 13 million tonnes of plastic leaks into the world's oceans. Canada, Mexico, the US and Europe produce the largest amount of plastic globally and 39.9% of plastic is used in packaging. Within this context, UNEP calls on people to refuse disposable plastic, refuse single-serving packaging, choose reusable lunch bags and coffee mugs, urge governments to enact deposit schemes and find innovative ways to replace-single use plastic in everyday life. UNEP offers a number of suggestions for rethinking plastic use and breaking up with disposable plastic.

Also on oceans, His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales announced a global call to action to save coral reefs as part of the International Year of the Reef. The Prince stressed, "we are at a critical tipping point, where we will either ensure or fatally compromise our ability to safeguard the world's coral reefs." The International Year of the Reef aims to raise awareness on the crisis facing coral reefs and increase support for coral reef conservation and science at an unprecedented scale.

Pierre-Yves Cousteau similarly called for action to tackle pollution and promote a circular economy. In a UNEP news story, he observed that over one-third of fish and seafood contains plastic and 80% of tap water contains microscopic plastic particles. Cousteau called on society to make a "purposeful choice" to promote a circular economy and ensure a healthy planet. [\[UNEP Press Release on UK\]](#) [\[UNEP Press Release on Israel\]](#) [\[UNEP Press Release on India\]](#) [\[UNEP World Environment Day Website\]](#) [\[UNEP World Environment Day Infographic\]](#) [\[UNEP Press Release on Call to Action\]](#) [\[UNEP News Story on Cousteau\]](#)



SDGS

- 3. GOOD HEALTH & WELL-BEING
- 11. SUSTAINABLE CITIES & COMMUNITIES
- 12. RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION & PRODUCTION
- 14. LIFE BELOW WATER

ISSUES

Governance, Health, Sustainable Consumption & Production, Sustainable Development, Human Settlements & Population, Oceans & Coasts, Chemicals & Wastes, National Action

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

Means of Implementation, Capacity Building & Education

ACTORS

UNEP, EU, Intergovernmental Organization, UN Programme, Agency or Fund, National Government

ACTIONS

Announcement / Statement

REGIONS

Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern America, Mexico and Central America, Southern Asia, Western Asia

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