



Rt Hon Theresa May, MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1A 2AA

15th December 2017

Dear Prime Minister,

We, the undersigned, are encouraged to hear of your announcement that the government is considering how to use Overseas Development Aid (ODA) to tackle the impacts of plastic in our oceans and the response the Department for International Development (DfID) and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs are considering. We ask that this response does not consider plastic in isolation but as part of a wider waste management problem. This will require a re-prioritisation of ODA to increase investment in pro-poor solid waste management in order to keep plastics out of the ocean *and* reduce poverty and related ill-health.

Marine litter has risen up the public and political agenda in recent months, and the impacts on wildlife caused by plastic in our oceans has been brought into stark relief on our TV screens. The extent of the impact of plastic pollution is still coming to light. Microplastics entering the food chain pose serious but as yet unknown consequences for human health, both in the UK and in poor coastal communities around the world that rely on fish as their main source of protein.

Plastic pollution is part of a wider waste management issue and the UN Environment Programme's authoritative Global Waste Management Outlook estimates that more than 2 billion people have no waste collection service and that even when waste is collected, it is often not managed properly. In lower-income cities in Africa and Asia (many of which lie in coastal areas), municipal solid waste generation is expected to double in the next 15–20 years. This waste ends up being burned or dumped in waterways and drainage channels. Plastics blocking drains is a major cause of flooding and of infectious diseases; diarrhoeal diseases are twice as common in communities without waste collection; and fumes from burning waste cause an estimated 270,000 premature deaths a year and contribute to climate change.

Extending waste collection services to all and eliminating open dumping and burning in low and middle-income countries would reduce the quantities of plastics entering the oceans, from coastal and upstream communities, by more than 50 percent. However, an analysis of OECD DAC figures reveal only 0.3 per cent of ODA is currently spent on waste management. The problem of marine litter as well the terrible burden of ill health and economic damage caused by mismanaged waste, is a compelling case for DfID to lead the way in pressing for ODA to waste management to be increased to at least 3 per cent.

Waste management is also a cost-effective engine for sustainable development. The Global Waste Management Outlook found that the cost of inaction to society was 5-10 times more than the cost of implementing a waste management system. Tackling waste, and moving to more circular based systems, offer multiple benefits; reducing pollution, improving health outcomes and providing income generating opportunities for people living in poverty. If local

FOLLOWING JESUS WHERE THE NEED IS GREATEST

---

100 Church Road, Teddington TW11 8QE United Kingdom  
T +44 (0)20 8977 9144 E [info@tearfund.org](mailto:info@tearfund.org) [tearfund.org](http://tearfund.org)

Registered office as above. Registered in England: 994339. A company limited by guarantee.  
Registered Charity No. 265464 (England & Wales) Registered Charity No. SC037624 (Scotland)

people can make a livelihood from recycling plastics, or use it to create other products to sell in local markets, then there is a positive 'pull' to prevent the plastic reaching the oceans.

The efforts that the UK government have made so far in reducing plastic pollution from the UK are welcome - helping lead the way to tackle a global problem that requires a shared global response. We urge your Government to continue to build on its high quality work overseas and take this opportunity to act courageously to eliminate the mismanagement of municipal solid wastes in developing countries, and thus to improve the lives of millions of people living in poverty, whilst addressing the threat of plastic to our shared marine environment.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nigel Harris', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nigel Harris, Chief Executive, Tearfund on behalf of:

Melissa Leach, Director, Institute of Development Studies

David C. Wilson, President, Chartered Institution of Wastes Management and Lead Author of the Global Waste Management Outlook

Mike Webster, Chief Executive, WasteAid UK

Cc: Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt, MP, Secretary of State for International Development  
Rt Hon Michael Gove, MP, Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Affairs