Global cooperation critical as criminal activity in plastic waste trade increases: WWF

Kuala Lumpur, 28 August 2020 -- The overwhelming amount of plastic waste generated by the world has opened the doors to criminal networks. A new INTERPOL report has revealed rising crime in the global plastic waste sector linked to illegal trade and illegal waste treatment. Illegal shipments have been detected in transregional and intraregional plastic waste trade routes. This has prompted the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) to call for global action by governments, law enforcement agencies, businesses and consumers.

INTERPOL has highlighted the infiltration of criminal networks in the plastic waste trade, through the illegal re-rerouting of shipments and unauthorised waste management methods. The scale of plastic waste mismanagement is far-reaching, involving at least 52 out of the 257 trade routes analysed by INTERPOL.

For decades, China was an easy solution for countries’ plastic waste, receiving half of the world’s plastic waste. Following its move to restrict plastic waste imports in 2018, the re-routing of shipments has overwhelmed alternative countries, opening the doors for opportunistic crime.

Developing Asian countries, especially those with limited waste management and enforcement capacities, are increasingly targeted. In May 2020, Malaysia initiated the costly and extensive process of repatriating 3,737 metric tons of plastic waste - equivalent to 150 shipping containers - to 13 different countries of origin.

International measures on globally traded plastic waste are set to take place from 2021 under the Basel Convention. Nevertheless, INTERPOL has highlighted the need to increase waste enforcement, as criminals have shown to be able to exploit changes in regulation to their advantage in the past couple years.
“Global plastic pollution is one of the most pervasive environmental threats to the planet today, and its correct regulation and management is of critical importance to global environmental security,” said the Chairperson of INTERPOL’s Environmental Compliance and Enforcement Committee Advisory Board, Calum MacDonald, who is also the Executive Director of the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA).

WWF recognises the need for countries including Malaysia to enhance cooperation between law enforcement authorities locally and internationally to address how criminal networks use vulnerabilities in global shipping routes to traffic everything from illegal plastic waste to illegal wildlife products. According to Jazlyn Lee, South East Asia Regional EPR Coordinator for WWF, “Waste crime is a rising threat with roots in a more fundamental problem: the inability to manage plastic use and production. The impacts of plastic pollution on marine ecosystems and the environment as a whole is far-reaching and now, the criminal implications of waste crime exacerbates the problem.”

“In order to address cross boundaries waste crime, there is an urgent need for countries to develop a National Action Plan, strengthen governance framework and transparency to effectively manage local waste, and shift towards a circular economy model. A circular economy model can be achieved by reducing or eliminating problematic and unnecessary single-use plastic items, and increase recyclability and recycled content in packaging by adopting an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) system on a national level,” Lee added.

Following INTERPOL’s call for enhanced international and inter-agency law enforcement cooperation, WWF has outlined a series of further recommendations required in an international response by governments.

a) Accelerate negotiations for a global legally binding agreement with clear national action plans and regulations, including support for waste management in low income countries.

b) Reinforce existing mechanisms such as phase out of single use plastics, improving domestic recycling capacity in developed markets and addressing gaps in waste management in developing economies.

c) Innovate and scale up environmentally sound alternatives to plastic.

d) Invest in research and capacity building for enhanced monitoring and enforcement on plastic waste.

Momentum is growing for a comprehensive global framework to address plastic pollution at its source. Almost 2 million people around the world have signed a WWF petition urging their governments to establish a legally binding global treaty to address marine plastic pollution and 133 countries have already voiced their support for exploring the option of a global agreement.

- Ends -
About the Report
The Strategic Analysis Report on “Emerging Criminal Trends in the Global Plastic Waste Market since January 2018” is published by INTERPOL. The report aims to identify criminal trends and threats emerging in the plastic waste market and identify law enforcement and policy responses. Based on official data provided by law enforcement agencies from 40 countries, a total of 257 transnational plastic waste trade routes involving 64 import countries and 57 export countries were reported. Qualitative and quantitative methods were employed in the analysis of data gathered through open source scanning, law enforcement data submissions, operational reports in 2019 as well as interviews with leading international experts on waste enforcement.

A public version of the report can be consulted on INTERPOL’s public website [www.interpol.int](http://www.interpol.int)

About WWF-Malaysia
WWF-Malaysia (World Wide Fund for Nature-Malaysia) was established in Malaysia in 1972. It currently runs more than 90 projects covering a diverse range of environmental conservation and protection work, from saving endangered species such as tigers and turtles, to protecting our highland forests, rivers and seas. The national conservation organisation also undertakes environmental education and advocacy work to achieve its conservation goals. Its mission is to stop the degradation of the earth’s natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the nation’s biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption. For latest news and media resources, visit [http://www.wwf.org.my/media_and_information/media_centre/](http://www.wwf.org.my/media_and_information/media_centre/)

Notes to the media:

1) All quotes are to be attributed to WWF-Malaysia

2) Should you need more information, please see the details below. Please note that this person is for contact purposes only and is not the organisation’s authorised spokesperson, so we would appreciate it if this name is not printed in the article:

Dora Hashim
Communications Manager, Sustainable Markets Programme
WWF-Malaysia
Email: shashim@wwf.org.my