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Press Statement

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### **World Oceans Day 2018: SAM calls for Ban of Single-Use Plastics to Prevent Plastic Pollution**

Plastic pollution has become a serious problem affecting the marine environment. This year's main action focus of World Oceans Day, celebrated each year on 8 June, is to prevent plastic pollution and encourage solutions for a healthy ocean. Hence, Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) calls for elimination of single-use plastics as a first step to beat plastic pollution.

Plastic packaging accounts for about half of the plastic waste in the world. The most common single-use plastics found in the environment are, in order of magnitude, cigarette butts, plastic drinking bottles, plastic bottle caps, food wrappers, plastic grocery bags, plastic lids, straws and stirrers, other types of plastic bags, and foam take-away containers. (The State of Plastics Report 2018 @UNEnvironment)

Much of the plastic produced globally is designed to be thrown away. Up till 2017, an estimated 8,300 million metric tons (Mt) of virgin plastics have been produced. As of 2015, only around 9% had been recycled, 12% was incinerated, and 79% was accumulated in landfills or the natural environment. If current production and waste management trends continue, it is predicted that roughly 12,000 Mt of plastic waste will be in landfills or in the natural environment by 2050 (Geyer et.al).

Coastal cleanups co-organized by SAM in the past few years in Segari, Perak had collected tonnes of marine litter, among them plastic debris. Fishermen also encounter plastics and other litter when they haul in their catch. The most visible impact of plastic pollution on marine life is ingestion of plastic debris, suffocation and entanglement of hundreds of marine species, including sea birds, turtles, fish, mussels, crustaceans and marine mammals.

Any harm to ecosystem functions and the services they provide, due to marine litter, ultimately will affect people's livelihoods and health. There are major concerns about the accumulation in the food chain of the toxic chemicals, the hydrophobic pollutants which float on the water surface, that accumulate on the surface of the plastics during their long residence time in polluted sea waters.

Recent studies show that over 90% of bottled water and even 83% of tap water contain microplastic particles. Trace amounts are turning up in our blood, stomachs, and lungs with increasing regularity. In the long term, we would be plagued with the consequences of continued use of plastics.

Studies by researchers have traced microplastics in the sea water surface in several locations in the coastal area and mangrove forests in Singapore and Malaysia. One study in Sementa Mangroves in Kapar, Selangor found that micro size polystyrene foam and plastic fragments were the most abundant and found microplastics at different depths of soil (Barasarathi et.al. 2014). The intrusion of micro-plastics into the aquatic ecosystems would surely have negative impacts in the food chain.

Besides the environmental health issues, the economic damage caused by plastic waste is vast. Plastic litter in the Asia-Pacific region costs its tourism, fishing and shipping industries \$1.3 billion per year. Studies suggest that the total economic damage to the world's marine ecosystem caused by plastic amounts to at least \$13 billion every year.

What is the solution? About 50% of consumer plastics are designed to be used only once. Producers must take responsibility for the full lifecycle costs and impacts of their products and packaging, and must redesign and innovate safer materials and systems.

For consumers, the best option is to replace single-use plastic products with reusable or refillable products that can provide the same service without using any disposable materials at all.

**Thus, SAM supports the nationwide ban on plastic bags within the span of a year, as announced by Housing and Local Government Minister Zuraida Kamaruddin in May 2018. We urge that this ban is followed with bans on other single-use disposable products and microplastics.**

If we do not do anything locally and globally, then the prediction that there would be more plastic in the oceans than fish by 2050, will be a reality.

#BeatPlasticPollution

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