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For Environmental Justice

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Media Statement

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Developed Countries Should Not Export Waste

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) applauds the Ministry of Environment and Water (KASA) for being diligent in inspecting the suspected shipment of plastic waste from the United States of America (USA). Nevertheless, exporting countries, especially developed countries like the USA should not export waste, take responsibility for their own waste and recycle domestically.

Minister of Environment and Water, Dato' Sri Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man in a media statement issued yesterday stated that the Department of Environment (DOE) in cooperation with other agencies, had conducted an inspection on two containers suspected to contain plastic waste from the United States that arrived at Port Klang on March 27, 2021.

The inspection found that the waste in the containers was polyethylene plastic waste and it was confirmed clean, homogeneous and in compliance with the criteria of B3011 Basel Convention. B3011 are the types of plastic wastes that are presumed to not be hazardous and, as such, not subject to the Prior Informed Consent procedure under the Basel Convention which requires the State of export to notify the State of import regarding the transboundary movement of the waste.

We are glad to know that the Malaysian authorities were thorough in their inspection of these two containers. We hope that the same inspection procedure is carried out for all importation of plastic waste to Malaysia in order to prevent the dumping of dirty, mixed and contaminated plastic waste in our country.

Malaysia has been flooded with plastic waste since 2018 after China imposed its import ban beginning January 2018. In fact, data of US waste exports indicate that in January 2021 alone, 9,800 tonnes of HS3915 plastic waste was exported from the USA to Malaysia. We hope that the authorities had checked each container that came through our ports, not only from the USA but other countries too, as not all would be as clean or homogenous.

Our environment and communities were badly impacted due to the operations of illegal recycling plants, dumping and burning of plastic waste. Even now, communities are wary of plastic waste imports and call for the government to stop importing waste.

A rich country like the USA should have the capacity to manage its own waste. Shifting the responsibility of dealing with plastic waste to developing and under-resourced countries is injustice.

Whilst the entire world is dealing with the bane of plastic waste, the corporations and businesses that created the plastic problem need to quickly address the problem. Plastic recycling should not be used as justification for further plastics and single-use plastic production. We need to move towards zero waste.

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