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Press Release

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Human sign in Penang sends powerful message to world leaders on a strong plastics treaty

As the world turns its attention to the upcoming UN negotiations for a global plastics treaty this November, Sahabat Alam Malaysia (Friends of the Earth Malaysia) with 190 students from a secondary school in Penang sent a bold message to governments, using their bodies to make a human sign spelling out the words "Strong Plastic Treaty" and a cloth banner urging the world to Reduce Plastic Production.

Teachers from SMK Datuk Hj Mohamed Nor Ahmad led their students into forming the human sign in their school field in Gelugor, Penang in an event jointly organised by Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) and the Consumers' Association Penang (CAP) on 8 October 2024. The organisations and the school community were united in the call for a strong treaty to tackle the plastic pollution crisis head-on and demanded action that cuts plastic waste at its very source.

Around 400 people who also attended a talk on plastic pollution and the Global Plastics Treaty were involved in the action. The school's senior assistant for co-curriculum Mohamad Adham bin Sallehon said this is an opportunity for them to pledge to reduce plastic use in the long run for the sake of future generations as plastic pollution is harming human health and the environment.

"We are gathered here today because plastic pollution has become a major crisis that has to be addressed urgently. Worldwide, more than 400 million tons of plastic is produced yearly, and more than half of this is single-use plastics," Mageswari Sangaralingam, Honorary Secretary of SAM, said at the school assembly. "Producing these plastics emits vast amounts of greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change and toxic chemicals that threaten our health. More plastic production means more plastic pollution."

The urgency of the plastic issue can no longer be overstated. Every day, the equivalent of 2,000 garbage trucks full of plastic are dumped into the world's oceans, rivers, and lakes, choking ecosystems and communities. The Global Plastics Treaty is an opportunity for systemic change across the whole life cycle of plastics. 2024 is a crucial year for this treaty, which aims to finalise the deal by the end of the year.

The demonstration is part of a growing global movement, with similar human sign actions being organised by other Friends of the Earth member groups and other organisations worldwide, including in South Korea during the Plastics Treaty Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-5) meeting. These coordinated efforts send an unequivocal message: the world needs a treaty that confronts the full scale of the plastic crisis, addressing pollution at every stage, from the extraction of fossil fuels to production, packaging, distribution, use and disposal.

Organisations and activists around the world are spotlighting the millions of tonnes of plastic waste wealthy nations are offloading onto countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Ghana, turning them into a dumping ground for the world's plastic problem.

As negotiations draw nearer, momentum is building. Affected communities and social and environmental movements around the world are gearing up, determined to counter the influence of fossil fuel and corporate interests that could dilute the Treaty's effectiveness, highlighting the need for a treaty that also holds corporations accountable.

You can read more about Friends of the Earth International's official demands for the Plastics Treaty here. (<https://www.foei.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Plastic-Treaty-Demands-3-PAGES-2.pdf>)

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