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Press Statement

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SAM & CAP welcome ban on e-waste imports and urge strict measures to curb smuggling

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) and the Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) welcome the announcement by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) that Malaysia has imposed an immediate and absolute ban on the importation of electronic waste (e-waste) effective 4 February 2026. It was reported that the second meeting of the Special Task Force on the Enforcement Management Roadmap for Plastic and E-Waste Imports also discussed a proposed three-month moratorium on the importation of plastic waste.

These measures are necessary to protect our environment and public health, besides reminding the world that Malaysia is not a dumping ground. MACC chief commissioner Tan Sri Azam Baki was quoted saying that firm and coordinated enforcement by all relevant agencies are essential to ensure the ban's effectiveness. We agree with him as waste trafficking poses serious risks to our country. Waste smugglers have no qualms about violating the law, bribing officials or looking into possible loopholes. Hence, vigilance and stringent enforcement are key to curb smuggling.

The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal prohibits the dumping of e-waste by industrialised countries to developing or emerging economies. In 2025, new rules came into force whereby all e-waste traded is subject to international controls of prior informed consent, not only those labelled "hazardous wastes".

At the ports of entry in Malaysia, illegal waste shipments may slip under the radar possibly because the shipments are declared as permissible goods, second-hand goods, used electronic goods or mixed metal scrap. There is also the element of organised crime and corruption in facilitating waste trafficking.

Electronic and electrical components contain heavy metals and many toxic substances. Hence, e-waste dumping and illegal recycling activities are hazardous to the environment and threaten the health of workers and neighbouring communities as they release toxic pollutants that contaminate the air, soil, dust, and water. We also have to deal with the consequences of microplastics generated during the recycling process that ultimately infiltrate water bodies.

Open burning and heating of e-waste are very hazardous due to the release of toxic fumes. We have encountered shredded e-waste dumped haphazardly and when these ignite, the fires spread toxic fumes. Communities exposed to the pollution face increasing risks of respiratory illness, and even long-term cancer risks. Chronic illnesses linked to e-waste exposure require long-term medical care which increases public healthcare spending and reduces productivity.

Strong enforcement is as important as strong laws. Malaysia needs to ensure enforcement with robust customs procedures, border controls, implement rigorous inspection, increase random and targeted inspections of shipments, crack down on corruption, impose effective penalties for violations and ensure swift and transparent prosecution of offenders. The penalties for waste smuggling must match the environmental harm and public health impacts.

The Guidelines for the Transboundary Movement of Used Electrical and Electronic Equipment (UEEE) in Malaysia, which provides guidance and criteria for the purpose of transboundary movement of UEEE or its components for direct reuse, reuse, repairing, and refurbishment should be assessed and loopholes closed because shipments are allowed as “second-hand goods” or “repairable” to mask waste.

Malaysia’s e-waste collection domestically has to be enhanced to ensure enough feedstock for the established licensed e-waste recycling plants. The relevant authorities must ensure these waste recycling facilities are complying with the law. Local authorities should also be vigilant and take action against illegal factories and illegal dumping in their area. Some of these illegal activities are reported by neighbouring communities. The local authorities and enforcement agencies should act on these tip-offs and also be proactive in patrolling to unveil illegal operations.

Clean up and remediation of contaminated soil and water incur high costs. Reduced crop yields due to unhealthy soil, toxic runoff into rivers and coastal waters which poison aquatic life also threaten livelihoods of our farmers and fishers. Who is going to pay for all this, and why should our communities suffer in terms of their health and livelihoods? This is why we have been calling for an end to waste trade and strong enforcement actions taken to curb smuggling and dumping of waste.

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