



MEDIA RELEASE

13 April 2023

New campaign highlights the human cost of our global plastic waste crisis

“The Rubbish Campaign” by Christian agency Tearfund is highlighting the human cost of the global plastic waste problem and calling on Australian households to join the effort to address this rubbish crisis.

‘The Rubbish Campaign’ is calling on Australian Christians to unite to address the urgent waste crisis that is unfolding: in our households and around the world.

Already suffering the worst impacts of COVID-19, extreme weather and hunger, growing landfills are making poverty worse for vulnerable communities around the world.

Between 2000 and 2019, plastics production doubled and plastic waste generation more than doubled, with nearly two thirds of this coming from plastics with lifetimes of under five years. (*OECD, 2022¹*).

Australia now produces 2.5 million tonnes of plastic waste each year, equating to 100 kilograms per person (*Dept of Agriculture, Water and Environment, 2021 report²*).

The reality is that plastic pollution is damaging the health and livelihoods of millions of people already living in poverty.

While the global conversation around waste and plastic pollution has accelerated, so has the impact of plastic pollution, but the human cost to this issue has largely been ignored and un-reported.

Mismanaged waste is responsible for up to a million deaths each year – that’s one person every 30 seconds (*Tearfund, Burning Question Report, 2019³*).

Growing landfills continue to have a severe impact on the health outcomes and agricultural livelihoods of people living in the poorest areas across the world.

In the slum communities of Mumbai where Tearfund’s partner Saahasee works, rubbish is a huge problem.

Poonam Nair, from Tearfund’s partner Saahasee in India says:

“People literally don’t have a place to put their garbage...it’s become normal practice to put plastic waste in the drains. The ramification is that most of the time these drains are blocked.

Because people are moving from rural areas towards the city in search of work, the population is increasing every month, so plastic pollution is also increasing. The waste that collects all over the community is impacting health.”

While we are seeing the harmful impact of plastic pollution, the world is starting to take notice.

During 2023 and 2024, nearly 200 governments are meeting to develop the first-ever international agreement on plastic pollution.

¹ <https://www.oecd.org/environment/plastic-pollution-is-growing-relentlessly-as-waste-management-and-recycling-fall-short.htm>

² <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/national-plastics-plan-2021.pdf>

³ <https://www.tearfund.org.au/resources/the-burning-question-report>

This agreement could help end the world's rubbish problem.

Already, Australia has shown a commitment to address the plastic pollution crisis by joining the *High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution*.

But ambition must translate to action to ensure the full impact of plastic pollution on our world's most vulnerable communities is addressed.

Tearfund is encouraging Australians to be part of the solution and to demonstrate their care for their global neighbours by signing their petition⁴.

The petition calls on the Australian Government to do all it can to influence global negotiations and ensure that this plastics treaty helps end the world's rubbish problem.

Tearfund CEO Matthew Maury is urging the government and Australian households to re-frame this issue from an environmental emergency to a social emergency that is costing human lives.

"God has blessed us with a beautiful world to look after and treasure. But right now, our world has a rubbish problem – and it's severely affecting the health and wellbeing of people living in poverty.

"A concerted global effort is needed to address this problem and deal with the scourge of plastic pollution and its impacts on poverty. The plastics treaty is a unique opportunity to do this.

"There is a growing awareness in Australia that plastic pollution is causing an environmental emergency, but it is also causing a social emergency. Behind the mountains of rubbish that pollutes and spoils our earth and oceans, our lives are made harder, and even cut short, by its impact.

"Plastic pollution is harming people's livelihoods, and undermining the progress made in recent decades to end poverty. It is literally making people sick. Dumping and burning of rubbish releases toxic fumes, floods communities and is causing up to a million deaths each year." Mr Maury said.

You can sign up to Tearfund Australia's petition and learn small and practical ways about how your household can reduce the global waste footprint⁵.



⁴ <https://www.tearfund.org.au/rubbish/sign>

⁵ <https://www.tearfund.org.au/stories/how-to-reduce-your-rubbish>