

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **South Africa to collaborate with Japan to combat plastic pollution, with technical support from UNIDO**

On 26 July 2019, the Government of Japan and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) signed an agreement for grant funding of US\$1.8m (about R25m) for the project to support a transition from conventional plastics to more environmentally sustainable alternatives in South Africa.

This follows a meeting between the Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Shinzo Abe, and the President of the Republic of South Africa, H.E. Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa, who was visiting Japan to attend the G20 Osaka Summit in June this year. Toward the realization of the G20's "Osaka Blue Ocean Vision", which aims to reduce additional pollution by marine plastic litter to zero by 2050, the Government of Japan has launched the "**MARINE** Initiative" to advance effective actions to combat marine plastic litter on a global scale, focusing on (1) **M**anagement of wastes, (2) **R**ecovery of marine litter, (3) **I**nnovation, and (4) **E**mpowerment.

The implementation of this project materialized the "MARINE Initiative", which will contribute to the realization of the "Osaka Blue Ocean Vision". The project will be implemented by UNIDO, in collaboration with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) over a period of three years.

The leakage of plastic waste into the environment, including the marine environment, is an issue of growing global concern. In South Africa, the need to find sustainable solutions is highlighted by the growing consumption of single-use plastic combined with weak waste collection, recycling and disposal systems. According to research conducted by Jamneck et al in 2015, the country in 2010 ranked 11<sup>th</sup> globally in terms of the mass of mismanaged plastic waste.

The ultimate goal of the project is to contribute to the reduction of plastic leakage into the environment, including the marine environment.

UNIDO will work with the CSIR to develop an action plan to strengthen the capacity of local industry to manufacture alternative materials, and build up capacities for plastic recycling. The project will include the assessment of new alternative materials such as home-compostable bio-degradable plastic to substitute single-use plastic products, and the demonstration of the feasibility of such alternatives in collaboration with industry. It will also focus on opportunities for local manufacturing and economic development. The project will draw on UNIDO's international expertise in investment promotion in technology and innovation and its leadership in the areas of circular economy and waste beneficiation, while the CSIR will bring to the project its extensive expertise in the assessment of possible new materials from a materials function and polymer science perspective. The CSIR will also ensure that applying new alternative materials to the South African context does not create new environmental challenges or hinder efforts to increase circularity.

According to the Ambassador of Japan to South Africa, H.E. Mr. Norio Maruyama, the signing ceremony marked the concrete achievement of what was discussed at the G20 in June 2019. He emphasized the importance of the collaboration of South African companies in the project.

The Honourable Deputy Minister Ms. Nomalungelo Gina of the Department of Trade and Industry (the dti) referred to the key objectives of South Africa's National Development Plan, and said "The dti welcomes the support by the Japanese government and the partnership between UNIDO and the CSIR, since biodegradable plastics are just being introduced locally."

CSIR Group Executive, Ms Khungeka Njobe, said, "We look forward to partnering with government and industry in addressing the very important issue of waste plastic."

Mr. Khaled El Mekwad, UNIDO Representative, explained that this initiative would be a model of good practice which could be disseminated to other countries in the SADC region. He said: "The experience acquired by South Africa could be extended to neighbouring countries where the triangular cooperation model with UNIDO and Japan may be replicated and adapted to the local development set-up."

Also speaking at the event, Ms. Trudi Makhaya, Advisor to the President on Economic Policy, welcomed the initiative. She said, "We hope that from this partnership there is agreement that there will be a lot of innovation but also a lot of practical applications of the innovations to new industries and new forms of economic activity that are inclusive, that take communities along, and that ensure that this new economy does not reproduce some of the flaws of the past."

#### **ENQUIRIES:**

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#### **Photograph:**

Speakers at the signing of the funding agreement in Pretoria on 26 July 2019:

**Front:** UNIDO Representative Mr. Khaled El Mekwad and Ambassador of Japan H.E. Mr. Norio Maruyama

**Back:** Mr. Anton Hanekom, Executive Director of Plastics SA; Advisor to the President on Economic Policy, Ms Trudi Makhaya; Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry Hon. Ms. Nomalungelo Gina; CSIR Group Executive for Business Excellence and Integration, Ms. Khungeka Njobe; and Deputy Director General of the Department of Science and Innovation, Mr. Daan du Toit.

