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Attn: News, Environment, Health Editors
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How plastics poison the circular economy:
Data from China, Indonesia, Russia and countries reveal plastics' public health threats
(Reports and media)

(Gothenburg, Sweden): As governments prepare to discuss a global instrument to tackle plastic pollution, IPEN has published a number of studies showing significant obstacles for countries seeking to implement safe plastic circular economies. The studies reveal that countries are unable to handle large volumes of diverse plastics waste streams safely, and the reality that, without regulations requiring plastic ingredients to be labeled, countries are blindly allowing known toxic chemicals onto their markets in plastic products.

IPEN says the problem will only get worse based on current forecasts of huge growth in plastic and chemical production and use. It calls for public policies to end the recycling of hazardous chemicals in plastics, that poison the circular economy and threaten human health. IPEN says that plastics producers have dodged their responsibilities by producing plastic materials with toxic chemicals and should be financially liable for any harm caused through the life cycle of plastics.

IPEN studies reveal toxic plastic waste issues in China, Indonesia and Russia
To better understand the risks associated with plastics and the circular economy, IPEN investigated the situation in three significant global economies – China, Indonesia and Russia. It analyzed:

- The volume and trends of plastic production, import and use;
- The status of waste management, recycling and their governance systems.

The results showed that all three countries struggled to safely manage massive volumes of plastic waste.

IPEN also carried out three studies on the presence of toxic chemicals in plastic and synthetic textile consumer products available on the market. (The chemicals in such products are used to impart functionality, such as stain or water resistance, or remain as a result of recycling plastic products that already contain toxic additives). The studies looked at the following widely recognized chemicals of concern:

- **Brominated flame retardants (BFRs)** in recycled plastic products from China, Indonesia and Russia;
- **Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), known as** 'forever chemicals', in clothing in China, Indonesia and Russia;
- **Bisphenol A (BPA)** in baby bottles in Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Russia, Sri Lanka and Tanzania.

These consumer product studies showed that toxic chemicals that have been banned under international chemicals conventions are being recycled from old waste into new consumer products, resulting in risks that are impossible to quantify because of lack of knowledge on the composition. Also, toxic chemicals continue to be used in consumer products in the countries assessed, despite being identified as harmful and restricted, or banned in other regions, further fueling the supply of non-circular hazardous plastic waste globally.

"Overall, the studies' findings paint a nightmare scenario of countries unable to deal with complex hazardous waste streams and citizens being exposed to toxic chemicals in everyday products," says Vito Buonsante, Policy & Technical Advisor, IPEN.

"The results of our tests are concerning, demonstrating that toxic chemicals are widely present in consumer plastic products, including products for children. Moreover, plastic contaminated with toxic chemicals are being recycled into new products that come into contact with vulnerable people, including babies and pregnant women," says Olga Speranskaya, policy advisor to Eco-Accord, one of the participating organizations in the studies.

"It is shocking to find that every single plastic product from China, Indonesia and Russia tested positive for banned flame retardants. There is no mechanism to warn people about the risks from being exposed to these chemicals. The results are clear, plastics are poisoning the circular economy," says Yuyun Ismawati. Co-founder at Nexus3 Foundation, Indonesia.

A meaningful global instrument to tackle plastics must address multiple issues

IPEN believes the situation needs an urgent international response. Between 28 February-2 March 2022, over 190 governments will meet in Kenya for the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) to decide on whether they should start negotiating a treaty on plastic pollution.

IPEN is calling for:

- The strengthening of global policies to simplify the range and reduce the volume of plastic materials in commerce, focusing on essential uses, the elimination of toxic chemicals in new plastics, and the labelling of chemical ingredients;
- Ending hazardous plastic waste management through policies that protect human health and the environment, including banning toxics recycling, the use of plastic waste as fuel, and incineration as a disposal method; and
- Holding plastic and chemical producers financially responsible for the social, economic, and environmental harm caused by their products through taxes, fees, and deposit return programs.

Editors and reporters, please contact Björn Beeler at Bjornbeeler@ipen.org, with questions and to arrange interviews.

IPEN (International Pollutants Elimination Network), the global environmental health network of over 600 organizations in over 128 countries, works to eliminate and reduce the most hazardous substances to forge a toxics-free future.

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