

Special Message



Plastics are clearly the manifestation of human intervention in our planetary system, leading to catastrophe. United Nations Environment report in 2018 stated that there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish by 2050, if we don't change. It's time that we stop plastic entering into the veins of our planet.

From Australia to Argentina and from my country Norway to New Zealand, the adverse impacts of plastics are omni-present. The images of marine life strangulated by plastic fibres and mammals like cows spilling out plastic bags from their guts clearly indicate that ' we are on the edge of cliff ' in addressing plastic-challenge. The fact that micro-plastic particles have already entered in to our body gives us shivers. We even do not know what they would do to our blood, brain and brawn.

But there is ray of hope. The youth from Universities and colleges have the minds that can take up any challenge. They are in position to demonstrate the creative local solutions and catalyse the viable global actions.

When I see the hundreds and thousands of youth from all over the world roll up the sleeves and carry the gunny-bags on their back to collect the single-use plastic thrown away on beaches and rivers, millions of hopes sparkle in my heart.

Huge collection drive is certainly a cause for celebration, but the grim reality is that the plastic keeps washing up on the beach because the source of that evil continues to flow in an overwhelming scale.

So the real message to be understood: change must happen upstream as well as downstream.

There is no better place than University campus to stream such wider actions. The students there are consumers of today and policy makers of future and agents for the change. If they are mobilised, we can transform the world from cliff-hanger to summit-climber.

This is what the '**framework document** for single-use-plastic ban in the university campus' developed by TERRE Policy Centre has done under their flagship project of *Smart Campus Cloud Network*.

Messages emanating from actions in the Smart Campus such as ban on plastic cutleries, bags, bottles and straws would be the impactful blows to the suppliers and manufacturers. The hitting message is : extended producer responsibility, where producers are held to account for the lifecycle of consumer products, including the costs to others down the line who have to clear them up. At the same time, companies doing the right thing must see the incentives of moving to a more circular model of design and production.

Plastic pollution is not easy to stop, but is definitely doable. And just like climate change, it requires us to collectively slam on the brakes. If we do that, the volunteers cleaning up their campus would be able to spend their time more on creativity and innovations.

Erik Solheim

—Erik Solheim

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Note: *Erik Solheim, before joining UNEP was career diplomat of Norway and has also received a number of awards for his work on climate and the environment, including UN Environment's Champions of the Earth award, TIME Magazine's Hero of the Environment, and an honorary doctorate from TERI University in Delhi, India. He has also written three books: **Den store samtalen, Naermere, and Politikk er a ville.***