

MEDIA RELEASE

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Swisscontact shares insights at ASEAN Conference on Combatting Plastic Pollution in Vientiane, Lao PDR 2024

Swisscontact collaborated on several sessions with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Conference on Combatting Plastic Pollution. The event brings together stakeholders from across ASEAN member states to exchange knowledge and strengthen regional cooperation in addressing plastic pollution. Michael Fink, Country Director in Laos, led the session and panel discussion on "Promoting Circular Economy toward better work conditions for Informal Waste Workers" and was a panelist in the session "pioneering the paradigm shift to phase out of plastic pollution".

Background:

The ASEAN Conference on Combatting Plastic Pollution 2024, themed "Action, Innovation, and Partnership to Phase Out Plastic Pollution," took place on 28-29 October 2024 in Vientiane, Lao PDR. This conference built on the achievements of the previous ACCPP held in Jakarta, Indonesia, by providing a platform for ASEAN Member States to share updates, discuss pipeline work, and find synergies for regional cooperation to combat plastic pollution. The event focused on developing concrete and actionable strategies, discussing the ongoing Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee Sessions to create a legally binding international instrument on plastic pollution, and showcasing key innovations and best practices. Highlights included the Ending Plastic Pollution Innovation Challenge (EPPIC), organised by the UNDP and supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norad, which presented innovative solutions from across ASEAN. An exhibition featured the innovations of 12 EPPIC winners and 12 other contributors from ASEAN, fostering collaboration and enhancing the resilience of the environment, economy, and community. The conference also provided a forum for networking, promoting sustainable and alternative products and services, and encouraging sustainable economic development. The key objectives were to strengthen comprehension and alignment related to the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution, share knowledge and experiences related to national plastic action plans and circular economy, and foster collaboration among innovators, businesses, governments, NGOs, scientists, and citizens.

Event:

The ASEAN Conference on Combatting Plastic Pollution 2024, held on 28-29 October 2024 at the DoubleTree Hilton Hotel in Vientiane, brought together experts and stakeholders to discuss innovative solutions and partnerships to phase out plastic pollution. The event featured sessions on regional collaboration, intergovernmental negotiations, and innovative approaches to plastic waste management. Key highlights included a high-level opening plenary, insightful keynote presentations, panel discus-

sions, and the launch of an exhibition showcasing innovations from the Ending Plastic Pollution Innovation Challenge (EPPIC) and other regional contributors. The conference provided a platform for ASEAN Member States to share knowledge, experiences, and strategies to address plastic pollution, fostering collaboration among innovators, businesses, governments, NGOs, and citizens.

Panel discussion on pioneering the paradigm shift to phase out of plastic pollution

During the panel discussion on pioneering the paradigm shift to phase out plastic pollution, experts shared insights on how to act and innovate in challenging and competitive environments. Mr. Pham Van Hieu, Team Lead at Viet Nam Environmental and Marine Science Institute, along with Michael Fink, Country Director of Swisscontact, discussed strategies and innovations. Souksaveuy Keotiamchanh, Founder of Zero Waste Laos, highlighted local initiatives, while the Director and Co-founder of Patihoub company provided a business perspective. Moderated by Nac Mi, Project Technical Officer at UNDP Cambodia, the session focused on lessons learned, best practices, and the importance of collaboration to combat plastic pollution effectively.

Session 4: Promoting Circular Economy toward better work conditions for Informal Waste Workers

This session on promoting a circular economy toward better work conditions for informal waste workers highlighted the increasing priority of municipal solid waste management in Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR, driven by rapid economic growth and urbanisation. The Lao government aims to achieve green and sustainable economic growth by 2025, emphasising inclusive development and environmental preservation. Informal waste pickers play a crucial yet often unrecognised role in this effort by significantly reducing landfill waste and increasing the volume of recyclables reaching the recycling value chain. Despite their contributions, these workers face challenges such as inadequate policy support, financial insecurity, and limited infrastructure development.

The session emphasised the importance of recognising and dignifying the role of informal waste pickers, enhancing policy guidance, capacity building, financial investment, and improved market access. It highlighted the key groups within the informal waste sector, including mobile waste pickers and those working at the KM32 Landfill, who deal with more contaminated waste and face greater marginalisation. The discussion underscored the need for comprehensive strategies to improve working conditions and support the livelihoods of these essential workers, aiming to boost recycling rates and contribute to a more sustainable waste management system in Lao PDR.

Swisscontact is an independent non-profit development organisation established in 1959 by representatives of the Swiss private sector and civil society.

Our development work focuses on unleashing the potential of private initiatives in developing and emerging countries. We foster sustainable and inclusive economic development with the objective of improving the quality of life for all.

Our work is based on three foundational pillars: We strengthen the competencies of individuals so they can improve their income and their opportunities for employment; we enhance the competitiveness of businesses to help them grow and become more resilient; we promote socio-economic systems that favour comprehensive development for widespread prosperity.

The organisation is currently active in over 130 projects in 41 countries with around 1400 employees. It is headquartered in Zurich, Switzerland.

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