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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Beijing Changier Education Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Discouraging the Consumerist Culture Facilitated by Social Media: A Path to Reducing Overconsumption and Protecting Both Workers and the Environment

The consumerist culture that has developed over the last 10-15 years is a direct result of the influence of mass media that encourages overconsumption through ads, movies, reality TV, social media, and celebrity and influencer glorification. This constant glorification of consumer products results in mass overconsumption as products are advertised as being impossibly cheap and marketed towards the average consumer as affordable. The massive amounts of waste being created from single use products as well as the inhumane working conditions used to create these products makes the culture of fast fashion and overconsumption both unsustainable and unethical. However, this overconsumption can be reduced through cultural shifts that promote multi-use products and affordable, sustainable materials instead of niche items that focus on the trend appeal.

In the current context of massive amounts of waste being mismanaged across the world, developing countries are disproportionately affected. For example, the United States of America sends most of its plastic waste per year to both the oceans and developing countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, and Viet Nam, since China's waste import ban which is detrimental to both the environment of these countries and the people that live there. This exploitation leads to further degradation of the disposal environments and prevents further advancements by creating an uninhabitable working environment.

Various international organizations and global partnerships have recognized these challenges and have implemented supportive measures. The Global Plastic Action Partnership (GPAP) and Community Action Against Plastic Waste (CAPws) are notable examples. These organizations provide support to both bring together governments and businesses to scale up plastic action globally and to individuals to reduce plastic waste while creating income within their communities. For example, GPAP enables collaboration with more than 900 organizations, including the Governments of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Canada, multinationals such as PepsiCo, The Coca-Cola Company and Nestlé, and international organizations and nonprofits like the World Bank Group, UNEP, WWF, GEF and World Resources Institute. These partnerships have provided influence and financial support that has helped facilitate sustainable data driven solutions within these companies and organizations. Similarly, CAPws leverages the technical and strategic partnership with stakeholders in the sustainability and climate action sector around the world while also facilitating individual cleanup and restoration activities across 3 continents. A study by the Community found that over 80,000 kg of waste has been collected, and has a growing number of over 500 youth leaders organizing cleanup activities and community outreach programs to help combat the menace of plastic pollution in our environment, highlighting the impact that the individuals and communities have made through sustainable partnerships focusing within the communities.

Despite these efforts, significant challenges remain as the root cause of plastic pollution remains in the "take-use-dispose" economy throughout the plastics life cycle. In order for this to be changed, there needs to be an economic shift away from this approach and towards a Circular Economy with a closed looped approach that implements multi-use products as the standard. Through a standard/economic reset, the culture that facilitates mass consumerism can be reshaped into one that values sustainable and ethical approaches over solely economical ones.

Furthermore, countries that receive imports of mass amounts of plastic waste are at the expense of the wealthier countries taking advantage of their lax trade laws and unprotected land and citizens. Both the production and the expulsion of the products made as a result of pressures from mass media are at the expense of those with limited options and at the advantage of the wealthy to increase their wealth.

To address these challenges and ensure future changes towards a both ethical and sustainable approach to changing product production and disposal, it is essential to adopt a multi-faceted approach that incorporated the following strategies:

1. **Education and Awareness:** Teach consumers to analyze their consumption habits and understand the long-term effects of overconsumption. Encourage them to consider the environmental and social costs of their purchases. Provide lessons on the life cycle of products, from raw material extraction to disposal, and discuss the impact of consumer choices on global supply chains and labor practices.
2. **Media and Social Reset:** Encouraging sustainable use of everyday products within mass media to discourage fast paced trends and encourage long lasting products. Make the norm to encourage consumers to use technology to research sustainable practices and share their findings through digital storytelling, social media campaigns, or online presentations.
3. **Promote Global Citizenship and Intercultural Understanding:** Integrate global citizenship education into the curriculum to help youth understand the interconnectedness of consumption, human rights, and environmental sustainability. Encourage intercultural exchanges and dialogues that expose youth to different perspectives on consumption and sustainability, fostering a more holistic and inclusive understanding of these issues.
4. **Labor and Disposal Policy Changes:** Governments and international organizations must advocate for policy reforms that address the mass production and mishandling of single use products. This includes reforming laws and regulations that promote fast fashion through inhumane working conditions and wages that are barely survivable. This also includes reforms that limit plastic exports from wealthy countries into developing ones. Through fairtrade and ethical practices, we can improve working conditions for the employees while improving fair wages, community benefits, and greater long term economic sustainability.
5. **Community and Individual Action:** Many organizations such as CAPWs have implemented community led cleanups to help promote a safe and clean environment in developing countries with a Circular Economy. Programs such as this need larger scale support so that individual cleanup and progress can be made. Engage consumers in project-based learning activities that address local sustainability challenges. Projects could include organizing recycling programs, or working with local businesses to promote eco-friendly practices.

By implementing these strategies, overconsumption can be reduced through social and economic means while creating a safe and balanced work environment that facilitates sustainability and growth. Reducing overconsumption is crucial for achieving a holistically sustainable economic cycle with support for both environmentally conscious and humanitarian approaches to producing and exporting products. It is through collective effort and sustained commitment that we can ensure a transition towards a Cyclical Economy. By addressing the impending issue of a world dominated by overproduction, we can successfully implement reforms and approaches to restore and protect both the environment and the people.

In conclusion, the strategies outlined—educating consumers, transitioning into sustainable media, promoting global understanding, policy changes, and individual action—pave the way towards a global environment where the world and the economy are not dependent upon an industry that deteriorates the Earth and the people and communities within it. Supporting these strategies is vital for achieving broader social and economic goals. Let us work together to create a future where the population and the economy work in unison with sustainable approaches that benefit each other and facilitate growth and prosperity.

We urge all delegates to support policies and actions that reduce the reliance on overconsumption while providing sustainable and accessible alternative strategies. Together, we can foster a future where the population and the economy is not dependent on the institutions that promote overconsumption.

Global Plastic Action Partnership shaping a circular economy ... (n.d.).

https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_FOA_GPAP.pdf

United Nations. (n.d.). Community action against plastic waste (capws). United Nations.

<https://www.un.org/en/civil-society/community-action-against-plastic-waste-capws>