

Mr. Achim Steiner
UNDP Administrator
United Nations Development Program
One United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017 USA

Beirut, February 15, 2018

Dear Mr. Steiner,

Your visit to Lebanon comes at a critical timing especially in relation to government policies regarding solid waste management. It is unfortunate that UNDP Office in Lebanon has been advising the Lebanese Central Government and Municipality of Beirut and encouraging them to adopt incinerators under the notion of “waste to energy” as the ultimate solution to the waste crisis that we are witnessing and that has gained international dimensions and attention.

We, as Waste Management Coalition, are addressing you today in your capacity as Administrator of UNDP because we know that during your mandate as UNEP Executive Director you were fighting chemical pollution and during the same period, UNEP issued a policy paper under the title: “Municipal solid waste: Is it garbage or gold?”.

We would like to quote few paragraphs from this policy paper namely:

- “Incineration is expensive in terms of capital and operating costs, and requires high standards of operation and maintenance. In many developing countries, MSW generally has a low energy value because of its high moisture content and the prior removal of paper and plastic by waste pickers. Incineration of such waste will require additional fuel in order to keep the wastes burning”.
- “Some WtE techniques might be more appropriate in developed or middle-income countries, while in developing countries, composting organic waste and biogas capture may be more useful to deal with waste high in organic matter. Large-scale investment in a specific technology, such as WtE, might also lead to technological “lock-in,” narrowing options in the future”.
- National governments can make a critical contribution by making waste management a national priority. They can also ensure the availability of skills, knowledge, and capacity to implement waste management programs effectively, especially at the local level, helping turn garbage to “gold.”

In Lebanon, organic waste constitutes 53% of the waste and has a high moisture content (60-70%). The calorific value of the mixed waste is estimated at 6.8 MJ/kg with fluctuations during the wet season, while in Europe they use a calorific value between 10 and 11 MJ/Kg to sustain a waste to energy. To increase the calorific value of waste we will have to incinerate all recyclables that are a valuable resource that can be recovered and create value chain economic benefits and generate employment. A study conducted by SWEEPNET in 2012, estimated that 39.7 million USD are annually lost from the 2,520 tons/day of waste in Beirut and Mount Lebanon area. If we extrapolate this figure to include all waste in Lebanon, which is estimated more than 6,500 tons/day, then the total financial loss due to the absence of complete recycling and composting would be greater than 103.3 million dollars. The energy to be generated by WtE facilities in Lebanon, will be minimal compared to the environmental damage that it will produce in view of the mismanagement that Lebanon has been witnessing in most of the central public facilities in the country.

We don't have a legal framework that can govern this type of technologies and their management, we have weak enforcement of legislation, and we don't have the proper infrastructure to dispose of hazardous ash nor labs to monitor emissions of such facilities especially persistent organic pollutants such as dioxins, furans and poly-aromatic hydrocarbons. Air pollutants in Lebanon exceed the permissible level set by WHO by 3 folds and Lebanon sustains the highest rate of cancer incidence in the Arab region.

We urge you to exert utmost pressure to redirect the course of action that UNDP office has taken in Lebanon. UNDP values should be as per their mandate: "Ethics, Accountability & Responsibilities as a Global Civil Servant".

We urge you to deter UNDP from advising our government in ways that will only lead to more environmental, health, social and economic disasters.

Instead, let us together "turn garbage into gold".

We stand ready to meet with you and provide you with any information needed.

Best regards,

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