Background Note

An end to electronic waste: Building the E-waste Coalition

WSIS High-Level Dialogue
International Telecommunication Union, Geneva, Switzerland
Wednesday 21st March 2018 (13:30 – 15:00)

Participating United Nations entities

Introduction

The transition towards a more digital world and a growing information society and economy offer unprecedented opportunities for sustainable development. At the same time, they contribute to the growth of the global consumption of electrical and electronic equipment, and – consequently – to growing amounts of electronic waste.

Used, broken, or obsolete equipment, such as phones, laptops, sensors, TVs, and fridges contain substances that pose considerable human health and environmental risks, especially if treated inadequately. Today, most e-waste is not properly documented and not treated through appropriate recycling chains and methods, whilst circular economy thinking has not been fully adopted. As a result, the amount of electronic waste, or e-waste, is growing rapidly and large dump sites exist throughout the world.

Taking into consideration the many existing initiatives and active stakeholders in the UN system in the area of e-waste, and following a proposal put forward by ITU, the UN Environment Management Group (EMG) established an inter-agency Issue Management Group on tackling e-waste.[1]

This high-level dialogue organized during the World Summit on the Information Society, provides a step towards strengthened commitment and greater collaboration amongst the UN entities. It is a platform for the signing of a Letter of Intent by the Heads of participating UN entities, for the exchange of views on the current e-waste management challenge and on considering concrete actions for UN system-wide coordination and collaboration on tackling e-waste. The event provides an opportunity for the participants to express their organisations' commitment to the e-waste challenge and a possible future E-waste Coalition, taking into account the work of the Issue Management Group, and its recommendations.

Form

The high-level dialogue will involve the signing of a Letter of Intent by the participating Heads of UN entities. It will be followed by a panel discussion among these Heads and representatives from the private sector, including ICT manufacturers and the recycling industry. The signing ceremony and panel discussion will be facilitated and moderated by a representative from outside the United Nations system.

Desired outputs of the high-level dialogue

- Exposure of the work of the participating UN entities and ongoing work by the Issue Management Group on Tackling E-waste, to the participants at the WSIS and the public at large, including plans for an E-waste Coalition.

- A greater understanding and recognition of the work and objectives of the Issue Management Group on Tackling E-waste.

- Further discourse between the private sector and UN entities, and the role and opportunities of the private sector in addressing the e-waste challenge

- Discussion around several questions relating to both the global challenge of e-waste, and the opportunities and challenges for UN entities and other stakeholders, in tackling e-waste.

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[1] Established in May 2016, the Group focuses on promoting system-wide coordinated action and collaboration in the area of e-waste as well as effectively supporting Member States in their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Such discussion questions may refer, but might not be limited to, the following:

- What is the current e-waste situation today, in terms of its generation and movement?
- What exactly do we know about the amount of e-waste in different countries and regions?
- What are the environmental and health implications of e-waste?
- What are the key trends that effect the amount of e-waste that we are producing?
- What is the link between e-waste and the broader sustainable development agenda?
- How well are different countries prepared to face the challenges of e-waste?
- What do today's recycling rates tell us about requirements to achieve zero waste?
- What is the role of the private sector in tackling the global challenge of e-waste?
- What are the key challenges which your organisation is working on to tackle e-waste?
- What would the benefits of a grand coalition be in tackling e-waste?
- What would your organisation like to see from a grand coalition on tackling e-waste?

Expected outcomes of the high-level dialogue

- Through an E-waste Coalition, long-term discussions among UN entities on the possibilities for increased programmatic collaboration and grand partnerships in their efforts to tackle e-waste.

- A possible follow-up meeting of signatories to the Letter of Intent at a later date, potentially bringing more participants into an E-waste Coalition.

- Possible support from partnering and interested private sector organisations for initiatives such as a UN system-wide Knowledge Sharing Platform on e-waste for which plans are currently being drafted.

Moderator

Mr. James Pennington, Circular Economy, World Economic Forum

Panellists

Mr. Houlin Zhao, Secretary-General, International Telecommunication Union
Mr. Nikhil Seth, Executive Director, United Nations Institute for Training and Research
Mr. Hiroshi Kuniyoshi, Deputy to the Director General, United Nations Industrial Development Organization
Mr. Elliott Harris, Assistant Secretary-General, UN Environment
Dr. María Mendiluce, Managing Director, World Business Council for Sustainable Development
(TBC) Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions
(TBC) United Nations University
(TBC) International Labour Organization

Related SDG Targets

3.9 – by 2030 substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water, and soil pollution and contamination.

8.3 – promote development-orientated policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage formalization and growth of micro-small and medium-sized enterprises including through access to financial services.

8.8 – protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments of all workers, including migrant workers, particularly women migrants, and those in precarious employment.

11.6 – by 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality, municipal and other waste management.

12.4 – by 2020, achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment.

12.5 – by 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling, and reuse.

Related WSIS Action Lines	C7 (environment)
Title of the session	Building an E-waste Coalition
Organizer of the session	International Telecommunication Union
Co-organizer of the session	Environment Management Group