

# Curb throw-away culture, says UN-Habitat chief, highlighting world day

Marking [World Habitat Day](#) on Monday, [UN-Habitat](#) – the agency mandated with promoting sustainable cities – has called for greater imagination and innovation in tackling the world’s waste management challenges, in particular at the municipal level.

“World Habitat Day provides us a unique opportunity to focus international attention on key issues surrounding sustainable urbanization, human settlements and improving urban living conditions,” said Maimunah Mohd Sharif, UN-Habitat’s Executive Director, during an event marking the day in Kenya’s capital, Nairobi.

“The amount of waste produced by individuals, communities, businesses, institutions, markets and factories continues to grow tremendously,” explained Ms. Sharif. “Some of it is recycled but a lot is simply discarded, causing health problems for people, their animals, and polluting our environment”.

Every year, the world produces two billion tonnes of waste.

“Tackling our waste management challenges requires imagination and innovation,” she stressed, noting that during her time as mayor of the State of Penang, in Malaysia, she pushed for people to “rethink” waste, in addition to adopting the now-famous “reduce, reuse, recycle” mantra.

According to UN-Habitat, 99 per cent of the items we purchase are thrown away within six months. “We can all make small adjustments to our consumption styles, by using alternatives to disposable plastic items, such as bottles, cups, plates and cutlery, making a conscious effort to recycle correctly and fixing broken items instead of simply throwing them away,” she said.

UN-Habitat, created in 1978 to promote sustainable urbanization on all fronts, is supporting cities more and more in their efforts to improve waste management practices, as well as design cost-effective systems to collect and dispose of garbage. Some of the initiatives highlighted by the agency include community-based waste management collection and recycling, as well as a one-off project titled “Trash to Art” calling on local artists to make a statement on sustainability by creating artwork using thrown-away materials.

“I believe that effective waste management starts with us as individuals,” said Ms. Sharif, adding that “through collective action, we can achieve a world that is cleaner, greener, safer, healthier and happier, for us to live, work and play”.