



Embassy of the
Federal Republic of Germany



The Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Cairo and the Ministry of Environment of the Arab Republic of Egypt

have the pleasure to invite you to the 68th Cairo Climate Talks (CCT) Panel Discussion

Water Pollution, Medical Waste and PPE: How do we deal with Covid-19 related solid waste?

on Wednesday, 2nd of September 2020 at 5:30 pm (Cairo time)
Virtual CCT via Zoom (Please register [here](#))



Solid waste is posing a major threat to the environment, livelihoods and human health. According to the World Bank [2.01 billion tonnes of municipal solid waste are produced yearly](#) and as the global population is expected to increase [to 9.8 billion in 2050](#), those numbers are expected to reach mind-staggering records. Measures aimed at curbing the spread of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic additionally increase the usage of non-recyclable waste such as Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and single use plastics dramatically. This is an urgent reminder that addressing solid waste must be at the core of climate politics.

According to Chinese officials, in the city of Wuhan where the virus was first discovered [240 tonnes of medical waste was produced daily in March 2020](#). This is largely due to PPE, mostly single-use protective gear such as masks, gloves and hazmat suits, used within medical facilities during the treatment of patients. Additionally, self-treatment and self-isolation for less extreme cases means infectious PPE is often discarded together with ordinary household waste, exposing those working in the trash collection, sorting and recycling businesses.

Before Covid-19 reached Egypt, [Cairo alone produced an annual household waste of 5.48 million tons](#), the majority of which is hand collected and separated by informal garbage workers in the region of El Zabaleen, named after the Arabic word for trash collectors. [While according to the Association for the Protection of the Environment \(APE\), they collect 40% of all waste and recycle an astonishing 85% of said waste](#), they carry a heavy burden due to their constant exposure to unsanitary waste.

The Egyptian Ministry of Environment stated in its report on the state of the environment that garbage collectors have the highest infection rates of several diseases due to prolonged exposure – leaving them particularly vulnerable to Covid-19 infections. While [Egyptian authorities have called for the careful disposal of PPE](#), by washing and disposing of it in separate plastic bags, continued inadequate disposal of potentially infected waste continues to pose a health threat to those working in the garbage industry. Despite campaigns to equip them with protective gear their protection remains scarce and insufficient. This increases the marginalisation of El Zabaleen's residents and threatens efforts to control the virus' spread.

Additionally, in an effort to reopen and ensure economic continuity, many businesses have switched to disposable cutleries and packaging to comply with Covid-19 related hygiene requirements. Single use plastics already pose a major threat to our environment, by polluting waterways and oceans, destroying biodiversity, filling landfills, increasing CO2 emissions and being ingested by animals and subsequently by humans. Sachets, commonly used for ketchup, instant coffee or shampoos, make up a staggering [850 billion pieces of plastic waste annually](#) – enough to cover the surface of our planet.

Governmental and non-governmental institutions across the globe are addressing the increasing waste production through different initiatives aimed at protecting people, ecosystems and sources of water. The 68th Cairo Climate Talk invites experts from various organisations to share their concerns, present possible solutions and raise awareness over the increasing need for all of us to act now.

The discussion will be opened by

Mr. Philippe Maupai

Head of the Science Department at the Embassy
of the Federal Republic of Germany

Representative of the Ministry (tba)

Ministry of Environment
of the Arab Republic of Egypt

Panelists

Ms. Ruth Erlbeck (tbc)

Head of the National Solid
Waste Management
Programme Egypt (NSWMP),
GIZ

Mr. Salem Massalha

Co-founder, VeryNile
Co-founder, Bassita

Ms. Syada Greiss

Board Chairman, Association for
the Protection of the
Environment (APE)

Mr. Ayman Sabae

CEO and Specialist in
International Health Systems
Management, Shamseya

Moderator: Ms. Nada El Shanawany, Researcher PHD Candidate for Behavioural Ecology



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