

Kathmandu Declaration on Transformative Action to End Open Burning of Waste in South Asia

Adopted at the South Asian Regional Dialogue, 6–7 September 2025, Kathmandu, Nepal

Preface

South Asia, home to over **1.9 billion people**, faces mounting challenges in waste management and air quality. The region generates approximately **70 million tonnes of solid waste annually**, with an average of **0.45 kg per capita per day**—below the global average of 0.74 kg¹. Yet, only **44% of this waste is formally collected**, while the remaining **56% is often disposed of through open burning, dumping, or littering**².

Open burning of waste is a major source of **particulate matter (PM)**, **black carbon (BC)**, **volatile organic compounds (VOCs)**, **greenhouse gases (GHGs)** **persistent organic pollutants (POPs)** such as **dioxins and furans**, and **toxic heavy metals like lead, mercury, and cadmium**. These pollutants contribute significantly to **air pollution, climate change, and public health crises**, particularly in low- and middle-income communities. Multiple reports—including the Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) Report (2024)³, State of Global Air (2020⁴, 2024⁵), and Health Effects Institute (HEI) (2020)⁶—highlight Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka as among the world's most vulnerable nations to air pollution, with PM_{2.5} levels surpassing WHO guidelines by several times, posing serious risks to public health and environmental sustainability.

Recognizing these threats, South Asian countries have begun taking steps to address open waste burning. Regional frameworks such as the **Malé Declaration on Control and Prevention of Air Pollution and its Likely Transboundary Effects for South Asia**, the **Roadmap for Sustainable Waste Management and Resource Circulation in South Asia (2019–2030)** and the newly endorsed **Jaipur Declaration on 3R and Circular Economy (2025–2035)** collectively provide strategic direction for advancing resource efficiency, pollution control, and sustainable development across the region.

Despite progress, open burning remains widespread due to **gaps in enforcement, limited infrastructure, low public awareness, and underlying socio-economic drivers**. A coordinated regional response is urgently needed—one that integrates policy reform, investment, innovation, and inclusive engagement, while also aligning with other global declarations and provisions adopted by UN agencies, including the

¹ Worldometer (2025). Population of Southern Asia. <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/southern-asia-population/>

² SACEP (2020). Waste Management Overview. <http://www.sacep.org/programmes/waste-management>

³ AQLI Reports Archive. <https://aqli.epic.uchicago.edu/dataInsights/archive?filter=report>

⁴ State of Global Air 2020. <https://www.stateofglobalair.org/sites/default/files/documents/2020-10/soga-2020-report.pdf>

⁵ State of Global Air 2024. <https://www.stateofglobalair.org/resources/report/state-global-air-report-2024>

⁶ HEI. <https://www.healtheffects.org/publications/air-pollution/content>

UN General Assembly's resolution declaring access to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as a universal human right⁷, the UNEA Resolution 3/8 on preventing and reducing air pollution⁸, and international conventions on pollution governance⁹ is essential for ensuring coherence, accountability, and long-term impact.

The **Kathmandu Declaration** emerges from this context as a call to action: to end open burning of waste and build a cleaner, healthier, and more resilient South Asia. It is one of the key outcomes of the **Regional Roadmap on Transformative Action to End Open Burning of Waste in Asia, 6-7 September 2025**

Preamble

We, the representatives of national and local governments, regional institutions, international organizations, civil society, youth groups, academia, and community leaders from across South Asia, convened in Kathmandu, Nepal, on 6–7 September 2025 for the South Asian Regional Dialogue on Transformative Action to End Open Burning of Waste.

Recognizing the grave environmental, public health, and socio-economic consequences of open burning of waste—including air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, toxic exposure, and ecosystem degradation—we affirm our shared responsibility to act with urgency, unity, and resolve.

We acknowledge the disproportionate burden borne by marginalized communities, particularly informal waste workers, women, and children, and frontline climate communities – those most exposed to environmental hazards and least equipped to recover from them. We reaffirm our commitment to inclusive, equitable, and rights-based approaches that prioritize the voices, needs, and leadership of those most affected.

We declare our collective intent to collaborate across borders, sectors, and communities to eliminate open burning of waste and accelerate the transition toward sustainable, climate-resilient, and socially just waste management systems will be grounded in zero waste principles and aligned with the vision of a circular economy.

⁷ UN General Assembly declares access to clean and healthy environment a universal human right. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/07/1123482>

⁸ Actions on Air Quality: A Global Summary of Policies and Programmes to Reduce Air Pollution. <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/actions-air-quality-global-summary-policies-and-programmes-reduce-air-pollution>

⁹ An overview of UN Activities and Initiatives related to Pollution. <https://unemg.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Mapping-report-%E2%80%98An-Overview-of-UN-Activities-and-Initiatives-related-to-Pollution-v3.pdf>

Our Shared Commitments

1. Policy Reform and Enforcement

- Review and strengthen international, national and subnational legislation to explicitly prohibit open burning of waste and ensure effective enforcement mechanisms.
- Establish robust enforcement mechanisms, including penalties, incentives, and institutional accountability.
- Integrate anti-burning measures into broader climate, health, urban development, and environmental governance frameworks to advance toxic-free, resilient, and sustainable communities.

2. Infrastructure and Investment

- Promote upstream interventions to reduce waste generation at source.
- Prioritize investment in waste segregation, collection, recycling, composting, and environmentally sound resource recovery and final treatment infrastructure.
- Support decentralized, community-led, and culturally appropriate waste management models.
- Mobilize and channelize domestic and international financing, including climate funds, development assistance, and public-private partnerships for impactful interventions that advance to circular economy (CE) solutions.
- Create targeted funding schemes for circular economy (CE) initiatives, ensuring they are distinct yet complementary to existing climate and adaptation finance.
- Identify and engage small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups as key innovation drivers to promote circular economy (CE) solutions, including waste valorization, eco-design, and resource-efficient technologies.
- Establish new, additional, and predictable financing mechanisms to support circular economy (CE) initiatives, including infrastructure development, innovation, capacity building, and inclusive participation across sectors.

3. Community Engagement and Inclusion

- Formalize the recognition and integration of informal waste workers into formal systems through legislation, ensuring fair remuneration, occupational safety, and access to social, economic and environmental justice.
- Implement targeted public awareness and education campaigns to shift societal norms and behaviors.
- Encourage, empower and build capacity of youth, women, and local leaders as agents of change and champions of zero-burning practices.
- Create inclusive spaces for meaningful partnerships with communities, civil society, and grassroots organizations to co-design and co-implement solutions, ensuring that local knowledge, needs, and leadership are central to decision-making.
- Strengthen public and community partnerships to foster shared ownership, trust, and active participation to stop open waste burning.

- Advocate for transformative change by actively engaging media platforms and legal jurisdictions to raise public awareness, influence policy discourse, and promote accountability in advancing anti-burning measures.

4. Regional Cooperation and Knowledge Exchange

- Leverage existing global and regional policy platforms for sustained dialogue, data sharing, technology transfer and coordinated regional actions on waste management and air quality.
- Research and facilitate cross-border learning through regional workshops, demonstration projects, and technical cooperation.
- Align regional efforts with global frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement, and the WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines.
- Utilise existing local government and mayor's platforms and capacity-building programs for local governments to take coordinated action against open burning, including policy implementation, community engagement, monitoring, and enforcement.
- Generate, share, and amplify evidence across borders—both within and between countries—to inform policy, strengthen regional collaboration, and accelerate the adoption of anti-burning measures.

5. Innovation, Data, and Monitoring

- Promote the development and deployment of modelling and digital tools—such as mobile applications, geospatial technologies, and satellite monitoring and Artificial Intelligence (AI)—to understand, detect and prevent open burning.
- Support science-based and policy research, innovation, and adoption of circular economy models and green technologies.
- Commit to transparent data harmonisation, reporting, participatory monitoring, community monitoring and regular progress reviews at national and regional levels.

Call to Action

The Kathmandu Declaration is not merely a statement of intent—it is a roadmap for urgent, coordinated, and sustained action to stop open waste burning in South Asia. We would like to see these action points reflected in the regional roadmap currently being developed by IGES and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC), ensuring alignment with ongoing regional efforts.

We declare our collective intent to stop open burning of waste across South Asia, recognizing it as an environmental and public health emergency. We would like to bring this to existing regional platforms such as SARRC, SACEP and Asia Pacific Clean Air Partnership as well as city mayor's networks to ensure mandatory measures that minimize PM_{2.5} concentrations to levels below WHO guidelines, and to accelerating the transition toward sustainable, toxic-free, and circular waste management systems.

We call upon international organizations, development partners, and regional institutions to support this mission through technical assistance, financing, and policy collaboration.

Let this declaration mark the beginning of a new era in South Asia—where waste is no longer burned but managed responsibly; where communities breathe clean air; and where regional solidarity drives environmental justice, public health, and climate resilience.

Adopted by Participants of the South Asian Regional Dialogue

This declaration was adopted by participants of the South Asian Regional Dialogue, including representatives from national and local governments, civil society and community-based organizations, youth organizations, academic and research institutions, the private sector and innovators, as well as regional and international organizations. **See Annex 1**

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Annex 1: A List of Participants

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