

NGO Comments at the Conclusion Session
Asia 3R Conference in Tokyo
November 1, 2006

Positive Sides -----

First of all, we would like to give thanks to the 3R Initiative for giving NGOs the opportunity to observe all the sessions and introduce our activities and thoughts at this conference. Compared to the previous conferences, where we weren't even allow to observe the working sessions regarding multi-stakeholder cooperation, a good progress was made on the part of organizers.

We found this conference valuable in the sense that it served for various stakeholders from various countries as a place to share an understanding of the urgent need to solve the waste issues, to exchange information on the problems, good practices, and efforts to advance the 3Rs. It was significant that implementation of EPR was discussed as a crucial step forward for solving the problems, even though there were obvious gaps between some countries and the other countries in terms of what EPR means and how to implement it within a country and in Asia. At the few times in the e-waste sessions, the progressive EPR implementation happening in Europe such as RoHS and WEEE were raised as reference, and we suggest that we continue consulting with other good programs outside of Asia.

Lack of a Sense of Urgency -----

However, we have been concerned with the lack of substantial discussions since the first 3R Initiative conference. It seems that the 3R Initiative conferences tend to focus on information exchange about recycling, without getting all the stakeholders engage in formalizing and implementing actions plans for reduction of waste generation and for multi-stakeholder cooperation.

We all know that with each passing moment, severe environmental contamination caused by toxic metals and chemicals used in the electronics industry is worsening and spreading, and more and more workers in the e-waste industry are suffering from the high level of heavy metal in blood, respiratory irritation, kidney, liver, brain damage, miscarriage, to name a few. We urge that the 3R Initiative to have a sense of urgency about addressing the environmental and health impacts of waste.

Need for a Higher Level of NGO Involvement -----

As many participants pointed out, NGOs have the role to raise public awareness about 3Rs issues and lead an action to tackle the issues. We are fully committed to doing so in cooperation with governments, industries, and other actors.

However, we would like to remind you that our roles are not limited to public education. As indicated in many presentations, NGOs are the one who first exposed the problems of global e-waste recycling by doing research in local communities, recording what were really happening with pens and camera, analyzing the research findings, and releasing the

findings via films, news papers and publications. NGOs have the hands-on experience with waste issues, the ability and mobility to research in the field, the understanding of diverse culture and language, all of which are expertise necessary for writing policy recommendation. We therefore maintain that policy forming processes of the 3R Initiative need a much higher level of NGO involvement beyond inviting us as observers.

No Excuse for Free Trade in Waste -----

One of the issues that are repeatedly raised at the e-waste sessions was the growing illegal practices of exporting, dumping and recycling that prevent the good recyclers to grow. A solution frequently proposed was to develop the formal recycling sector via capacity building or technology transfer in developing countries.

We agree with the point raised by some that it is irresponsible of countries to send wastes that contain hazardous materials for recycling to other countries without assessing technologic feasibility, economic feasibility, AND the existing occupational health and environmental regulations. It is known that even in state of the art facilities located in developed countries, hazardous waste recycling will involve exposing workers to hazards and producing toxic residues or emissions.

Externalization of environmental and social costs to weaker economics always works as a disincentive to develop an environmentally and socially responsible system in a country where technology and funding are readily available. The good example of the disincentive is the JPEPA (Japan Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement), which potentially eliminate tariffs on exports of toxic waste from Japan to the Philippine. This would promote the migration of wastes from Japan to the Philippines, unfairly burdening the Philippines with Japanese waste.

There was a series of projects introduced by aid agencies for capacity building, technology transfer, and cooperation. We have a fear that these might be taken as a path to the door for free trade in waste, ignoring the multilateral environmental agreements such as Basel Ban Amendment.

Conclusion -----

Lastly, we have two suggestion regarding logistics of future 3Rs conferences. First, we propose holding a meeting in such a place where participants have a chance to witness the environmental and health impacts of waste. Also, information exchange programs such as 3R Knowledge Hug should be translated into all languages from all the countries in Asia, if it really aims at empowering countries in Asia

While the 3Rs initiative has a lot of shortcomings to be fixed, we also believe that it is providing a vital platform for Asian countries to start implementing Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle and we are eager to continue making a positive contribution to the 3R Initiative to become a global leading policy.

Contact:

Asia Waste Watch in Tokyo e-mail: asia-gomiken@eden-j.org