

2025 World Environment Day Concludes Successfully: United Call to End Plastic Pollution

- 2025 World Environment Day ceremony to be held in South Korea on June 5, 2025, for the first time in 28 years as a result of high-level meeting between Ministry of Environment and UNEP (September 2023)
- Concluded successfully with high-level delegations from 19 countries and over 20 side events

The Ministry of Environment (Minister Kim Wansup) announced that the ceremony and major side events commemorating the 2025 World Environment Day (June 5), held at the International Convention Center (ICC) Jeju (located in Seogwipo, Jeju) from June 4 to 5, concluded successfully with the participation of around 10,000 people from 19 countries.

This year's World Environment Day ceremony is being held as a result of South Korea being selected as the host country for the 2025 World Environment Day ceremony* during a high-level meeting between the Ministry of Environment and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), held on September 20, 2023, at the UNEP office in New York.

* World Environment Day is an official UN commemorative day established in 1972 following the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment.

On October 28 of the following year (2024), the Ministry of Environment and the UNEP announced that Jeju Special Self-Governing Province had been selected* as the host site for this year's World Environment Day ceremony on June 5.

* This marks the first time in 28 years that South Korea is hosting the event, following Seoul (Olympic Gymnastics Arena) in 1997.

The 2025 World Environment Day ceremony, held under the theme “Beat Plastic Pollution,” was attended by government delegations from 19 countries, as well as representatives from international organizations such as the UNEP, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and the International Transport Forum. In addition, around 10,000 participants representing various sectors, including civil society, academia, and youth from both Korea and abroad, took part in the ceremony and over 20 official side events.

On the day before the ceremony (June 4), a plastic policy and industry seminar was held at the ICC Jeju, where representatives from the Korea Environment Corporation, the Korea Institute of Energy Research, and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) Korea Office participated to discuss plastic circular economy technologies and directions for industrial development.

In a congratulatory speech at the seminar, Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change of Bangladesh, stated, “We hope to engage in exchanges with Korea in many areas, including the ‘Allbaro’ system and the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) program.”

Also at the seminar, Patrick Schröder, a senior research fellow at Chatham House and an expert on the circular economy, drew attention by presenting “International Trends in the Plastic Circular Economy.” As one of the authors of the UNEP ‘Global Environment Outlook,’ he emphasized the importance of policy decisions based on scientific facts and introduced the ongoing UN Plastics Treaty.

At the “Future Generations Environmental Forum” held on the same day, Han Wha-jin, Co-chair of the Presidential Commission on Carbon Neutrality and Green Growth, and Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the UNEP, held a Q&A session with young participants on the topic of environmental policy.

When a young participant, who identified as a student at Jeju International School, pointed out that “youth voices still remain on the sidelines of government policy-making,” Co-chair Han responded, “Young people are not just an audience but key actors in shaping the future of policy,” and added, “We will continue to expand participation channels.” She also emphasized, “Honest feedback from youth greatly contributes to improving the quality of policies.”

Meanwhile, Executive Director Andersen urged the youth to “take the microphone themselves rather than wait for opportunities, and continue to ask questions and speak out based on scientific facts.” She went on to mention the example of Jeju’s haenyeo (women divers), stating that “the knowledge of local communities who have lived with the sea for generations is a valuable record and lesson on environmental change,” highlighting the importance of combining traditional knowledge with science to develop sustainable solutions.

At the ministerial roundtable held on June 5 at the Shilla Jeju, high-level delegations from 11 key partner countries* and ambassadors to Korea gathered to discuss cooperative measures to end global plastic pollution.

* South Korea, Japan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Mozambique, Kyrgyz Republic, Brazil, Vietnam, Indonesia, Azerbaijan, Laos

At the meeting, Bounkham Vorachit, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of Laos, emphasized that “international cooperation is crucial for the transition to a circular economy,” and introduced waste management capacity-building projects carried out in partnership with South Korea. Roberto Mito Albino, Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries of Mozambique, highlighted the sanitary landfill development project that has been ongoing in cooperation with the Korean Ministry of Environment since 2009, stressing that “solidarity and knowledge sharing are essential in addressing complex environmental challenges.”

Meanwhile, the 2025 World Environment Day ceremony, held at 2 p.m. on June 5 for one hour at the ICC Jeju, was conducted as an eco-friendly, zero-

waste event—featuring invitations made from recycled seashells (in the form of badge-style passes) and paper-based trash bins, with no use of disposable items.

Notably, on this day, Jeong Eun-hae, Director General for International Cooperation Bureau, announced the ‘Action for Circular Economy (ACE) Initiative*,’ a new international circular economy cooperation plan aimed at ending plastic pollution.

* Action for Circular Economy Initiative: Aims to shift traditional, support-focused international cooperation toward a problem-solving collaborative framework, working with organizations such as the UNEP and multilateral development banks, to implement tailored projects that address plastic pollution.

Jeong Eun-hae, Director General for International Cooperation Bureau, stated, “We hope this World Environment Day serves not merely as an event, but as an opportunity for us to reflect on ourselves and commit to small changes.” She added, “We are both victims and contributors to plastic pollution. This is why we must be the ones to solve this issue,” and called for a willingness to embrace small inconveniences as part of that change.