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PRESS STATEMENT: URGENT CALL TO HALT LAGOS STATE'S WASTE-TO-ENERGY INCINERATOR PLAN AND ADOPT SUSTAINABLE WASTE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Protocols,

Gentlemen of the Press, ladies and gentlemen, **(Weyinmi)**

I am pleased to welcome you all to this media event to formally release to the public our concerns about the Lagos State Government's announcement (on the 28th of May) to build a waste-to-energy incinerator. I'm Weyinmi Okotie, and I am from the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives with my other colleagues. We are here today to address a matter of great urgency and concern for the residents of Lagos and the wider environment: the Lagos State Government's proposed plan to build a waste-to-energy incinerator.

The Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, or GAIA, is a worldwide network of over 1,000 organisations fighting for a future free from waste pollution. We advocate for a shift away from incineration and towards a "zero waste" approach. This means reducing waste at its source, composting organic materials, and maximizing recycling. GAIA supports local efforts to implement these solutions and challenge policies that promote incineration. Our goal is a just and sustainable world where communities are empowered to manage waste responsibly and live in a healthy environment. In Nigeria, GAIA members are a total of 11 public interest NGOs/civil societies who are spread across the different cities in Nigeria but are here in Lagos today to solidrise with its Lagos members.

Gentlemen of the Press, once again I welcome you all.

What are incinerators (Waste-to-Energy Incinerators): (Weyinmi)

Incinerators are facilities that treat waste by burning it. They come under many names such as "mass burn incinerators," "thermal treatment facilities," or so-called "waste-to-energy" (WTE) plants, and involve processes such as combustion, pyrolysis, gasification, or plasma arc. But they all have the same claim— "burning waste will make our waste problems disappear."

Among the most aggressively promoted incinerators are "waste-to-energy" facilities. Not only do they claim to make waste "disappear," they also claim to produce energy during the process. But studies have shown that this premise is without scientific basis. The process of incineration merely transforms the waste into other forms of wastes, such as toxic ash and air and water pollution, which are harder to contain and usually more toxic than the original form of the waste. The term is also a misnomer—

waste is a highly inefficient fuel, and these facilities are barely able to generate even a small amount of electricity.

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What have we done: (Dr Leslie Adogame- SRADev)

We (GAIA Nigeria) learned about the Lagos State Government's (LASG) plans to build a Waste-to-Energy municipal incinerator through an MOU signed by the Governor of Lagos State on …. Recognizing the significance and potential impact of such a project, we immediately sought to engage with the government to understand the situation better. Despite our efforts, it was challenging to obtain clear information or cooperation from the LASG. Projects of this magnitude should adopt a multi-stakeholder approach involving public entities, private sectors, community groups, and civil society organizations (CSOs). Unfortunately, it appears that the government did not conduct any consultations, resulting in a project that lacks comprehensive support and sustainability.

In response to the government's lack of engagement, we developed and submitted a petition (signed by **146 Public Interest Organizations** and **251 Individual Environmental Justice Advocates** from 64 Countries Saying NO to the Proposed Waste Incineration Facility in Lagos) on the 1st of July to the Governor of Lagos State and the Lagos State Ministry of Environment. Copies of the petition are available for review. In our accompanying letter, we expressed our willingness to engage in constructive dialogue and expected an invitation from the government to discuss our concerns. However, three weeks have passed without any acknowledgement or response, as it where, it seems that the government is moving so fast with the initiative. As a result, we are left with no choice but to invite you all to this National Press briefing to inform the public about the environmental and health hazards associated with building a waste-to-energy incinerator and to advocate for more sustainable and inclusive waste management solutions.

Why are we calling the government: (Dr Leslie- SRADeV)

Lagos, the Centre of Excellence, should not adopt outdated technologies that are being phased out in the Global North. Implementing a waste-to-energy incinerator in Lagos contradicts the city's aspiration to be a leader in sustainability and innovation, especially with its growing interest and recognition in climate change advocacy. If Lagos adopts this flawed approach, it sets a dangerous precedent for the rest of Nigeria and Africa.

Moreover, a study by the University of Plymouth in 2012 found that a sea-level rise of just 3 to 9 feet (approximately 1 to 3 meters) would have catastrophic effects on human activities in Lagos, which has an average elevation of only 2 meters above sea level. Adopting waste-to-energy technology in such a vulnerable area poses significant environmental and public health risks. Lagos State should focus on sustainable waste management practices that do not threaten its future or that of its residents. So we are encouraging Lagos State Government continue to be a part of the Climate solution and not part of its own problem.

a. **Waste-to-Energy Incineration is Expensive and Inefficient:** Waste incineration is the most expensive [5] and least efficient way to generate energy. Due to the low calorific value of waste, Waste-to-Energy plants convert less than 25% [6] of material energy in garbage into marketed electricity, even lower than other polluting systems –35% for coal and 45% for natural gas systems. Despite low energy production, incinerators are capital-intensive. The general cost [5] is twice the cost of coal-fired power plants. Operation and maintenance costs are also 10 times higher [5] than coal. Investing over $150 million to $230 million [7] in large, modern facilities designed by European companies might be lucrative for the companies but not for the nearby communities or for the local government–the waste incineration industry has the highest negative economic impacts [8] from air pollution compared to the financial value added by the industry.

b. **Waste-to-Energy Incineration Emits Toxic Pollutants:** The presence of any incinerator poses substantial risks to the health and environment of surrounding communities.

Biomonitoring research in the Netherlands[9], [10] has revealed evidence of persistent organic pollutants in the environment surrounding Waste-to-Energy incinerators across the region.

Waste-to-energy incinerators emit a noxious cocktail of harmful pollutants into the atmosphere, such as lead, mercury, dioxins, and furans. Facility workers and residents in nearby communities face health risks from direct exposure to these toxins, and there are global risks associated with indirect exposure through the food chain. [11]

To make the same amount of energy as a coal power plant [12], waste incinerators in 2018 released 65% more carbon dioxide (CO_2), as much carbon monoxide, three times as much nitrogen oxides (NOx), five times as much mercury, nearly six times as much lead and 27 times more hydrochloric acid (HCl). [13]

c. **Waste-to-Energy Incinerators Contribute to Climate Change**: Incinerators emit higher levels of CO_2 per megawatt-hour compared to coal, natural gas, or oil power plants. Incinerating materials such as wood, paper, yard debris, and food discards is in no way "climate neutral"; rather, incinerating these and other materials is detrimental to the climate and will not help Nigeria meet its commitments under the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). As pointed out by GAIA in a recent report, energy recovery is not an effective mitigation strategy: incineration is a major source of GHG emissions, with each ton of plastic burned resulting in the release of 1.43 tons of CO_2, even after energy recovery.

Nigeria signed the Paris Agreement [14], which agrees to phase out coal-powered plants. However, the Lagos State government intends to build a waste-to-energy facility that emits 65% more CO_2 than coal-powered plants [13].

In a study from 2012, the UK's University of Plymouth found that a sea-level rise of just 3 to 9 feet (about 1 to 3 meters) "will have a catastrophic effect on the human activities" in Lagos, which only has an elevation of 2 meters above sea levels.

d. **Waste-to-Energy Incineration Undermines Sustainable Zero Waste Practices:** Waste incineration is incompatible with zero waste solutions, undermines real solutions and a truly circular economy. Once built, Waste-to-energy incinerators demand a guaranteed stream of waste which becomes a major disincentive for waste prevention and zero waste. More than 90% [(15)] of materials currently disposed of in incinerators and landfills can be reused, recycled, and composted. Zero waste practices, as well as renewable energies such as solar and wind, can serve to mitigate climate change by more efficiently contributing to building a closed-loop and circular economy

e. **Waste-to-Energy Incineration Takes Away Jobs**: Incinerators offer relatively few jobs when compared to recycling. For example, recycling creates 50 times more jobs [(16)] than incineration and landfilling.

The Lagos Association of Scrap and Waste Pickers reports over 3,700 registered [(17)] informal workers. Given Nigeria's rising unemployment [(18)] and the well-known impact of incinerators on recyclable materials, the proposed waste-to-energy project in Lagos warrants a social impact, as incinerators are known to displace waste pickers who rely on recovering recyclables [(19)] for their livelihood.

f. **Waste-to-Energy Incineration is an Environmental Injustice**: Throughout the world, communities have fought against Waste-to-Energy facilities because they tend to be disproportionately located in low-income communities, burdening residents with high toxicity, accidents and noise. Unsafe work environments, land grabbing, displacement and resettlement, and corruption in decision-making processes are other socio-economic issues associated with placing waste incinerators in communities.[(20)]

There are several technical challenges involved in transferring this obsolete technology -that is currently being phased out in Europe and the United States- to the Global South. These problems include (Neil, 2023): [(21)] It is expensive and technically challenging to monitor stack emissions and incinerator ash toxicity continuously; the organic composition of municipal waste in Lagos State is (41.8 -68.57%)[(22)] which makes incinerators inefficient; Inadequate disposal facilities for toxic ash pose environmental and public health risks. Shortages in trained personnel and budgetary constraints further hinder operations and maintenance.

OUR DEMANDS (Mr Akpan Anthony- PAVE)

We, the undersigned organizations, who are advocates for a just, toxic-free zero waste world, urge the Lagos State Government to:

1. **Halt Plans to Adopt the Epe Waste-To-Energy Incinerator:** We strongly recommend that the Lagos State government immediately halt its plans to construct a waste-to-energy incinerator plant and impose a moratorium on the building of any waste incineration plants.
2. **Adopt a Zero Waste Approach**: We strongly urge the Lagos State Government to prioritize the implementation of zero waste strategies (which exemplify a truly Circular Economy driven strategic approach to resource management and preservation), such as reduction of waste generation, source segregation, recycling, composting, and reuse programs. These approaches prioritize value retention and provide more environmentally friendly and economically efficient options as alternatives to incineration. In addition, it is crucial to invest in research and development of waste management technologies and approaches that prioritize environmental protection, public health, and social equity, such as composting and recycling. Products and materials that are difficult to recycle should be phased out from the market and replaced by alternative materials or models of delivery.
3. **Carryout Broader Consultation with the Public and Environmental CSOs:** This comprehensive and transparent consultation process should involve the fenceline communities, environmental CSOs, waste management experts and public engagement to accurately inform the public about the potential environmental, social, and health implications of the proposed incinerator on the surrounding communities in Epe and their ecosystems. Furthermore, this process should be inclusive and prioritize meaningful, equitable participation of all impacted right holders, upholding Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), which means incorporating waste pickers, waste workers, and fenceline communities throughout the project lifecycle, starting from the development planning stage.

Invitation to Join Us (Weyinmi)

We invite all concerned citizens, environmental organizations, and stakeholders to join us in this critical fight for a cleaner, healthier Lagos. Together, we can make a difference and protect our environment for future generations.

Once more, we welcome you all the invited seasoned journalists, media reporters and NGO advocates to take the opportunity of this event to disseminate widely the dangers inherent in adopting a Waste-to-Energy Incinerator to manage our waste.

Gentlemen of the Press, we thank you for your attention and may God bless you all.

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Environmental Groups and Activists Urging the LASG to Halt WtE Incineration Plan		
S/No	**Organisation**	**Region**
1	Sustainable Research and Action for Environmental Development (SRADev)	Lagos
2	Pan African Vision for the Environment (PAVE)	Lagos
3	Sustainable Environment Development Initiative	Edo
4	Community Development Advocacy Foundation (CODAF)	Delta, Lagos
5	Environmental Rights Action / Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN)	Edo
6	Green Knowledge Foundation (GKF)	Delta
7	Centre for Earth Works (CFEW)	Plateau
8	Lekeh Development Foundation	Rivers
9	Community Action Against Plastic Waste (CAPws)	F.C.T.
10	Policy Alert	Akwa Ibom
11	Young Farmers Network	F.C.T.
12	Ecocykle	F.C.T.

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