

Garbage in, garbage out

image: <https://www.philstar.com/images/authors/1804859.jpg>

[FROM THE STANDS - Domini M. Torrevillas](#) (The Philippine Star) - January 15, 2019 - 12:00am

While we are desperately looking for effective garbage management systems in our country, foreign countries are settling theirs by dumping their garbage in our country. This is an insult to our people. Foreign governments should be ashamed of private garbage disposal companies shipping their residents' mess and dumping it in our shores. So far Canada and South Korea have been found committing such a pernicious act.

According to media reports, last Sunday the Bureau of Customs held formal ceremonies marking the return of some of the garbage imported by Verde Soko from South Korea in Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental.

Rep. Juliet Uy (Mis. Or. 2nd District) witnessed the "turnover" rites, saying the invitation to be present at the scene gave her the opportunity, on behalf of her district constituents to thank the government of South Korea, the Bureau of Customs, the DENR, environmental NGOs, and others who have addressed the solid waste management issue.

The volume of garbage from South Korea dumped in Tagoloan is 6,500 metric tons according to Simon. Of that volume, 1,500 tons were contained in 51 containers that constituted the first batch transported back to South Korea on Sunday.

BOC collector John Simon of the Mindanao International Container Port said that the scheduled Jan. 9 shipping out of the 51 containers of garbage was delayed for a few days because the container ship (MV "Kalliroe V852S") that would return the container vans to South Korea would be arriving only on Sunday.

Rep. Uy is vice chair of the committee on small business and entrepreneurship development, and a member of the trade and industry, appropriations, and 15 other committees. The Congresswoman made clear her opposition to any move, plan, or proposal to keep the garbage in Tagoloan and recycle it.

She said, "All, not just part or some, of the total garbage shipments stored at MICT should be returned to South Korea. All of it. There should be no gray areas in this regard."

Some 5,000 metric tons of garbage still have to be shipped back to South Korea on or before the end of this month, according to the Bureau of Customs.

Uy also said she will "pursue accountability and address problems in our government policy, operations, and procedures that allow the importation of all solid wastes."

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Witnessing the ceremonial departure of the unwanted vans containing garbage, Aileen Lucero, national coordinator of EcoWaste Coalition, was quoted as saying "the waste shipments violated Korean and Philippine customs and environment laws, as well as the Basel Convention."

The first shipment of garbage from Korea is an initial victory for environmentalists. But they still have another battle to wage: getting Canadian trash out of the country.

On the 17th anniversary of the country's Ecological Solid Waste Management Act, the Coalition sent Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau a letter via email reminding him of his promise to take back the trash-filled container vans in Philippine ports as they continued to pose "health hazards" to people.

"We ask PM Trudeau to expedite the re-importation of their garbage, settle all necessary obligations and put the festering dumping scandal to rest," Aileen Lucero said.

The letter was signed by over 100 Filipinos attending a Zero Waste conference organized by the EcoWaste Coalition.

During the 31st Asean Summit in November 2017 Trudeau assured President Rodrigo Duterte that Canada was working on a solution to the garbage dumping controversy.

Soon after Trudeau left Manila, the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority announced the urgent need to remove the Canadian trash-filled containers from the Subic port as the stench had become "unbearable" and posed "health hazards."

Some 103 shipping containers of garbage described as scrap plastics for recycling were sent to the Philippines in 2013-2014 by private Canadian companies.

Sixty-four percent of the shipments were solid waste or garbage destined for immediate local disposal and cannot be recycled as per waste analysis and characterization study in 2014 by the Department on Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

Such garbage shipments, according to the DENR, "are strictly prohibited to be exported and are classified as Waste No. Y46 listed in Annex II of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal."

Importer Adelfa Eduardo and customs broker Sherjun Saldon were subsequently charged in court for violation of Republic Act 6969 (Toxic Substances and Hazardous and Nuclear Wastes Control Act of 1990) and tariff and customs laws.

PDI internet reporter JPV wrote that in June 2016, Judge Tita Bughao-Alisuag of the Regional Trial Court of Manila (Branch 1) ordered the return of the 50 containers covered by Criminal Case No. 143-11191, emphasizing that the Philippines is not a "trash bin" and that the dumping incident "should not be made a precedent for other countries to follow." The court order has yet to be complied with.

It has been five years since the waste from Canada arrived in Manila and about half of it has already been dumped in Capas, Tarlac.

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The good news is that a city in the Philippines is a model in trash management. This is San Fernando City in Pampanga.

The fault about the horrible garbage situation is not to be blamed on the countries, plastic pollution expert Stiv Wilson says in his “Story of Stuff Project” in Berkeley, California. The fault lies with corporations.

“International companies are selling more and more plastic to Southeast Asia, even in places without basic waste management. In the absence of familiar municipal waste systems, like citywide trash trucks and trash cans, most trash gets thrown outside. Plastic piles up under houses and in streets, then wash into rivers, onto beaches and out to the sea in seasonal rains.

‘If a company opens a new market, knowing there is nowhere for their waste to go other than the environment, and then we blame the people for that, that’s criminal,” according to Wilson.

“Our solution is to address the source,” said Froilan Grate, who spearheaded San Fernando’s trash transformation. Grate heads the nonprofit Mother Earth Foundation, which helps cities develop programs to manage their waste. For Grate, stopping ocean pollution means keeping plastic trash out of the environment in the first place. And that means rethinking waste management.

“San Fernando used to compost or recycle just 13 percent of its trash. It relied on garbage trucks to collect waste house-by-house, as is the case in North America and Europe. But hauling and transporting waste is expensive, and Southeast Asian cities have heavy traffic and high population densities. These places often can only afford to dispatch garbage trucks to a fraction of households. San Fernando was servicing just half the city.”

Grate suggested to San Fernando government executives that instead of sending trash trucks to every house, the poor can make a living by picking through trash for recyclables to sell. He suggested hiring them as civil servants. The trash pickers collect food scraps and recyclables from every house daily and bring it all to one of 35 waste warehouses throughout San Fernando. Then garbage trucks haul them from hubs.

The new system, according to Grate, is much cheaper because it’s more efficient, costing about 80 percent less, while dramatically reducing litter and pollution. More than 75 percent of waste gets composted or recycled, now, and San Fernando ultimately aims to hit 93 percent.

What happened in San Fernando, said Grate, could be duplicated in other parts of the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and India. All these countries have densely populated urban areas, and plenty of poor waste pickers can earn money as litter-fighting civil servants.

Read more at <https://www.philstar.com/opinion/2019/01/15/1885131/garbage-in-garbage-out#JRaK68uSJs9W7tAG.99>