



ZERO WASTE FORUM 2026

YOUTH SESSION

Youth Declar**ACTION** *on Zero Waste & Climate Action*

A youth-led call to action from the Zero Waste Forum 2026 — on the road to **COP31**
in Antalya, November 2026.

Organized by **Genç Diplomasi Derneği** (Youth Diplomacy Association)

In partnership with the **Zero Waste Foundation** & the COP31 High-Level Climate Champion's Office

ISTANBUL, TÜRKİYE · 6 JUNE 2026

ADOPTED BY 80 YOUTH DELEGATES

Diplomacy for all, not for the few



The world is facing increasingly severe ecological challenges with each passing day. As young people, we have a responsibility to act today so that we are not forced to bear the consequences of these challenges tomorrow. Climate change and sustainability are no longer solely environmental concerns; they have become central to international cooperation and global solidarity.

As the Youth Diplomacy Association, guided by our motto, "Diplomacy for All, Not for the Few," we believe that young people should not only participate in discussions on global issues but also contribute to shaping their solutions. The Youth-Led Zero Waste Action Platform, organized as part of the Zero Waste Forum, is a reflection of this vision.

Bringing together young people from around the world, the platform provided a space to exchange ideas on climate change and zero waste, develop policy recommendations, and collaboratively draft a declaration. Participants also engaged directly with policymakers and representatives of international organizations, ensuring that youth perspectives became part of the broader conversation. As the world moves towards COP31 Antalya, this initiative represents an important step in strengthening the role of young people in global climate action.

We hope this publication reflects the collective commitment of young people to building a more sustainable future, and we extend our sincere appreciation to everyone who contributed to making this platform possible.

We wish to thank **Mr.Samed Ağırbaş**, President of the Zero Waste Foundation and COP31 High-Level Climate Champion, for his visionary leadership, and the staff and advisors of the Zero Waste Foundation whose commitment ensured that young people's engagement was meaningful and carried forward onto the road to COP31.

"The greatest challenges facing the world today are not limited to climate change. We cannot speak of true global justice while millions continue to face hunger, lack access to electricity, and live in poverty."

Background & Contents



BACKGROUND

This DeclarACTION is the product of a structured process of deliberation, drafting, and academic review. Eighty selected delegates from the GDD and youth international delegates worked across three thematic commissions — moving from problem identification to concrete recommendations under the guidance of experienced facilitators.

The outputs of each commission were brought together into a single collective text and presented to an academic consultation panel, which reviewed the consolidated draft for analytical rigour, evidence grounding, and alignment with current policy frameworks. We thank **Hilde van Dijon** and **Samuel Rigu** for their thoughtful review and guidance.

CONTENTS

Foreword – Genç Diplomasi Derneği	02
Background & Contents	03
I – Circular Economy & Economic Transformation	04
II – Innovation & Entrepreneurship	07
III – Zero Waste, Sustainable Systems & Energy	10
Action & Accountability	13
Annex – Organizations & Programmes Represented	15

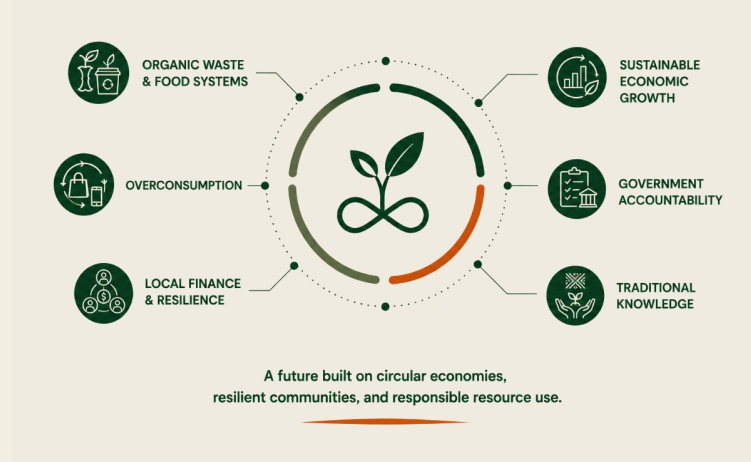
I COMMISSION I Circular Economy & Economic Transformation



The transition to a circular economy has become a key priority for achieving sustainable development and long-term economic resilience. Traditional linear economic models, based on excessive consumption and continuous waste generation, place increasing pressure on natural resources and economic systems. A circular economy promotes resource efficiency, innovation, and sustainable growth while reducing environmental impacts.

Young people have an important role in shaping this transformation through leadership, innovation, and active participation. Recognizing this responsibility, the participants of the Circular Economy and Economic Transformation Commission present the following declaration.

Identified Challenges



01 Organic Waste & Food System Inefficiency

Organic waste occurs across the entire value chain — production and distribution, not only households and restaurants. Food waste is closely tied to global hunger and food security. Surplus and discarded organic material that could nourish people, sustain livestock, or restore soils is too often lost rather than recovered.

02 Disproportionate Overconsumption

Global resources continue to be consumed at unsustainable rates. Consumption has become a marker of social status, while the frequent replacement of functional products generates avoidable material and electronic waste. This culture of constant acquisition accelerates resource depletion.

03 Centralized Funding & Energy Systems

The lack of fair distribution and clear regulation of financial resources limits the growth of local circular economy initiatives. Highly centralized funding structures and energy systems reduce local autonomy, slow the flow of resources to communities, and weaken regional resilience.

04 Growth vs. Environmental Sustainability

Short-term economic models frequently conflict with environmental objectives. Achieving genuine sustainability requires long-term growth that decouples prosperity from resource extraction and waste generation.

05 Weak Government Accountability

Many governments lack sufficient accountability mechanisms for implementing circular economy and sustainability policies. Without transparent monitoring and enforceable, sector-specific obligations, commitments often fail to translate into measurable real-world progress.

06 Overlooked Traditional Knowledge

Indigenous, traditional, and local knowledge systems are frequently overlooked in circular economy and food-system planning. They carry valuable practices for composting, nutrient recovery, soil restoration, and community governance — essential for resilient, low-carbon, zero-waste communities.

Recommendations & Commitments



01 Community-Led Circular Food Systems

Governments should redirect surplus food to people, livestock, and healthy soils; support local composting, nutrient recovery, and soil restoration; and address organic waste at production and distribution levels to combat hunger and strengthen food security.

02 Decentralize & Localize Resources

Decentralize funds through community financial mechanisms and local loan hubs; establish government intermediaries for fair distribution and regulation; and decentralize energy grids to strengthen local resilience, autonomy, and access.

03 Reduce Overconsumption

Detach social status from constant consumption and recognize resource efficiency as a shared value; extend the use of functional products rather than replacing them; and raise public awareness of sustainable consumption and responsible production.

04 Strengthen Accountability

Set up clear monitoring and reporting systems for circular economy policies; publish regular, publicly accessible reports; and involve youth, civil society, academia, and the private sector in reviewing policies.

05 Enforceable, Sector-Specific Policy

Implement real-world policies businesses are required to follow; develop sector-specific regulations aligned with circular economy principles; and promote long-term sustainable growth as the foundation for lasting environmental sustainability.

06 Incorporate Traditional Knowledge

Recognize Indigenous, traditional, and local knowledge as essential to resilient, low-carbon communities; integrate it into circular solutions; and invest in our shared future through climate mitigation, waste reduction, and just food systems.

We reaffirm our commitment to sustainable economic transformation through innovation, cooperation, and responsible resource management – and call upon governments, businesses, civil society, and young people to build a more resilient, circular future for all.

II

COMMISSION II

Innovation & Entrepreneurship



Waste generation, unsustainable consumption, and unequal access to green innovation have emerged as defining challenges of the twenty-first century. Rapid population growth, the proliferation of non-biodegradable materials, and corporate practices disconnected from environmental accountability continue to strain planetary boundaries and deepen existing inequalities.

Young people remain systematically underrepresented in the decisions that shape sustainability outcomes, despite being among those most directly affected. Empowering youth as present-day innovators, advocates, and leaders is essential. Recognizing this, the participants of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Commission present the following declaration.

“As the COP31 Presidency Youth Climate Champion, my focus is on elevating the voices of those children and young people leading action on climate change in their communities. This includes a focus on elevating the innovation, creativity and resilience of young people in our agriculture sector and the critical role they play in ensuring the resilience of our food systems.”

SALLY HIGGINS – COP31 PRESIDENCY YOUTH CLIMATE CHAMPION

Identified Challenges



01 Structural Barriers to Youth Innovation

Young people are disproportionately affected by sustainability challenges yet frequently excluded from the decisions meant to address them. Despite the largest youth population in human history, they face barriers of visibility, representation, and credibility that limit their role as actors in sustainability systems.

02 Limited Access to Funding & Mentorship

Meaningful innovation requires education, technology, connectivity, and financial support — resources that are not equitably distributed. Rural and underserved communities often lack reliable internet, while high energy costs, scarce mentorship, and the absence of community input reduce the reach of locally relevant innovation.

03 Low Corporate Awareness

The emissions and waste of widely operating corporations remain disproportionately high, driven in part by low employee awareness of environmental practices and limited organizational commitment to waste reduction and resource efficiency.

04 Inaccessible Sustainable Alternatives

Biodegradable and eco-friendly products are often unavailable in smaller towns and rural areas, and their higher cost limits uptake. As a result, many consumers continue to rely on non-biodegradable products, increasing environmental pollution.

05 Unequal Distribution of Benefits

The benefits of innovation remain unevenly distributed. Projects developed without local input generate lower engagement and reduced effectiveness, ensuring the communities most in need of sustainable solutions are often the last to benefit from them.

06 Rising Waste from Population Growth

With a global population exceeding eight billion, waste generation has become one of the most urgent environmental challenges. Finding effective pathways to reduce waste and promote sustainable consumption is essential for protecting resources for coming generations.

Recommendations & Commitments



01 Scale Youth-Led Initiatives

Support young people in creating scalable solutions; increase youth access to investment and financial opportunities; and foster partnerships that enable youth innovations to be replicated across regions and countries.

02 Youth Inclusion in Decision-Making

Each country should ensure youth representation in relevant UN processes; establish international youth consultation mechanisms on global sustainability; and integrate sustainability education into school curricula from an early age.

03 Corporate Accountability & Training

Ministries of environment should designate qualified environmental experts at city level to deliver sustainability training to corporations and conduct regular compliance reviews, with findings published after each inspection.

04 Make Alternatives Accessible

Governments should incentivize uptake of biodegradable and eco-friendly products through reward programs, tax reductions, and cashback schemes, making sustainable alternatives financially accessible to a broader population.

05 Bridge the Innovation Access Gap

Expand access to funding, mentorship, and digital education in rural and underserved communities. Solutions should be co-developed with local communities and designed to be both locally relevant and globally scalable.

06 Hold Corporations Accountable

Require corporations to make sustainable options more accessible; transition product materials toward eco-friendly alternatives; and develop policies that phase out the production of non-biodegradable products.

Meaningful progress requires dismantling the structural barriers to education, technology, funding, and representation. Through accountability, collaboration, and scalable entrepreneurship, we call for a future in which sustainable alternatives are accessible to all.

III

COMMISSION III

Zero Waste, Sustainable Systems & Energy Transition



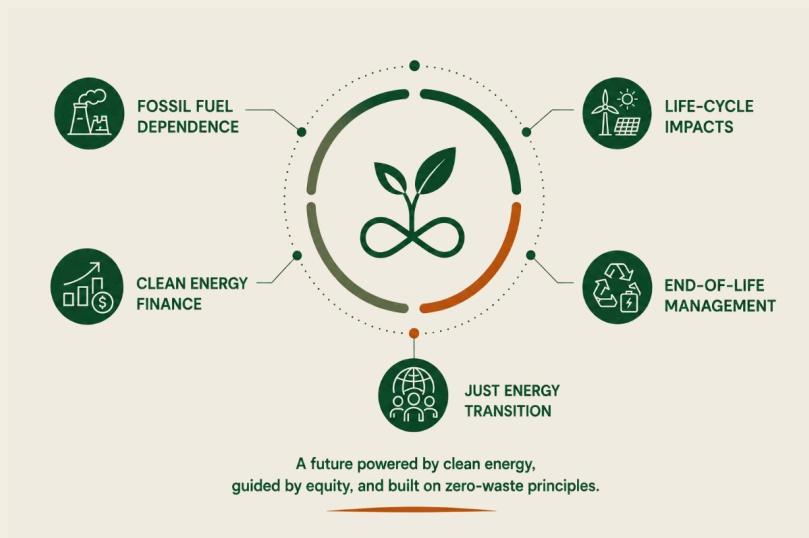
The global transition toward sustainable energy and zero-waste systems has become one of the defining governance challenges of our time. Reducing dependence on fossil fuels and building circular resource systems requires comprehensive restructuring of infrastructure, financing, and political frameworks across all levels of governance.

The path to a climate-secure future is not a simple technical exercise; it involves profound economic, ethical, and logistical tensions that must be navigated with equity and realism. The transition will not deliver its potential if it generates new waste, deepens inequalities, or leaves exposed communities without affordable, reliable energy. Recognizing this, the participants present the following declaration.

“Decarbonize the demand. Make energy use more efficient. Build the grids and storage. Increase the use and production of sustainable fuels. That is the transition—and it is already improving people’s daily lives: through the cars they drive, the systems powering their homes, lower energy bills, cleaner air, and reduced energy waste.”

SAMED AĞIRBAŞ & DAM IOSCHPE — THE KOREA TIMES, “ACTION AGENDA CAN HELP ASIA SCALE ITS ENERGY TRANSITION,” 24 APRIL 2026

Identified Challenges



01 Persistent Dependence on Fossil Fuels

The global energy system remains heavily dependent on finite fossil fuels, sustained by entrenched industrial infrastructure, transportation systems, and investment structures that continue to favour carbon-intensive sources over sustainable alternatives.

02 Life-Cycle Impacts of Renewables

Renewable systems significantly reduce operational emissions but are not without cost across their life cycle. Manufacturing solar panels, wind turbines, and batteries requires intensive extraction of materials such as cobalt and lithium, generating emissions and ecological disruption.

03 Insufficient Clean-Energy Financing

The current cost advantage of fossil fuels continues to constrain investment in clean alternatives. Financing for sustainable energy projects remains scarce, particularly for communities in the global south and regions with limited access to international capital markets.

04 End-of-Life Renewable Components

Turbine blades, solar panels, and battery cells are difficult or impossible to recycle with current technologies. Without enforceable extended producer responsibility, these materials risk a new wave of hazardous waste — undermining the zero-waste principles transitions should embody.

05 Inequitable Distribution of Transition Costs

Countries do not begin from the same starting point. Developing regions bear the greatest burden of climate impacts while contributing least to cumulative emissions. Without differentiated policies and targeted support, costs and benefits will be inequitably distributed.

Recommendations & Commitments



01 International Energy Transition Fund

A global fund financed by governments, institutions, and the private sector — operating with full transparency, publishing annual reports, and prioritizing access for developing regions.

02 Differentiated Transition Models

Transition plans developed per country's starting conditions and resources. Annual intergovernmental meetings should publish trackable, publicly accessible, adequately funded plans.

03 Cooperation with Historical Accountability

Developed countries should acknowledge their disproportionate share of cumulative emissions — contributing beyond minimum obligations, sharing technology, and providing expert support.

04 Pre-Approval Environmental Assessment

Governments should adopt pre-approval research frameworks, assigning qualified environmental engineers to assess ecological impacts — particularly mining — before project approval.

05 Resilience & Emergency Planning

Invest in backup storage and green hydrogen reserves and diversify energy sources to reduce crisis vulnerability. Long-term protections must hold during emergencies, supported by international coordination.

06 Extended Producer Responsibility

Hold manufacturers legally and financially responsible for end-of-life management of renewable products, incentivizing design for recyclability and reuse in line with zero-waste principles.

07 The Role of Nuclear Energy

Nuclear offers significant generation capacity without direct CO₂ emissions and warrants inclusion in energy-diversity discussions — with heavy regulation and proactive risk management as non-negotiable conditions.

A just, effective, zero-waste energy transition is possible. It requires political will, equitable financing, and governance that ensures no community is left to absorb the costs of a transition they did not cause.

Commitments & Requests



COMMISSION	YOUTH COMMITMENTS	REQUESTS TO GOVERNMENTS
I Circular Economy & Economic Transformation	• Advocate for circular food systems that reduce organic waste — a key methane and climate lever. • Champion resource efficiency and circular consumption as shared social values. • Incorporate traditional and Indigenous knowledge into local circular and climate solutions. • Track and publicly report our own progress on waste, food systems, and climate.	• Commit to community-led circular food systems; treat organic waste as a climate & food-security priority. • Decentralize funding and energy systems to strengthen local resilience. • Establish enforceable, sector-specific policies with transparent monitoring and youth participation. • Recognize and integrate Indigenous knowledge into climate-aligned waste and food planning.
II Innovation & Entrepreneurship	• Develop and scale youth-led climate innovations, prioritizing rural and underserved access. • Apply consumer pressure and direct corporate engagement for sustainable practices. • Build international youth networks for green entrepreneurship and replication. • Advocate for youth as structural decision-makers — not consultees — in governance.	• Guarantee youth representation in climate decision-making, including UN and COP processes. • Mandate corporate accountability for emissions and waste via enforceable standards. • Expand equitable access to financing, mentorship, digital infrastructure, and education. • Incentivize the shift to biodegradable, low-carbon products; phase out non-biodegradables.

Commitments & Requests



COMMISSION	YOUTH COMMITMENTS	REQUESTS TO GOVERNMENTS
III Zero Waste, Sustainable Systems & Energy Transition	• Advocate for just, differentiated transition policies reflecting unequal starting conditions. • Support transparency and accountability in international climate finance and transition funds. • Promote zero-waste principles — including scrutiny of renewables' full life-cycle impacts. • Engage publics on energy diversity with accurate, accessible, evidence-based information.	• Establish a transparently governed International Energy Transition Fund with priority for developing regions. • Adopt differentiated national transition plans, inclusively developed and publicly tracked. • Require pre-approval environmental assessment for renewable projects, including mining. • Implement extended producer responsibility for renewable-energy components. • Maintain environmental protections during energy crises; invest in diversified sources. • Developed countries must honour historical responsibility through finance, technology, and expertise.

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ROAD TO COP31, ANTALYA

Organizations & Programmes Represented

 Genç Diplomasi Derneği

 Accept International (Kenya)

 The Ashley Lashley Foundation

 Centre for Environmental Sustainability

 Children and Youth Major Group — UNEP

 Climate Change Expert

 COP31 Youth Climate Champion

 CRFAIR

 David Suzuki Foundation

 Empower Youth Movement

 Entkillla

 Equa Consulting

 Green Center for Societal Transformation

 Green Hope Foundation

 Gua Africa

 Hill Plast

 IAAI GloCha — Youth and Climate

 International Youth Conference

 Living Soils Initiative

 Lucky Summer Environmental

 Mara Terrazzo

 Mathare Roots Initiative

 Mto Wangu Initiative

 The Mustard Seed

 Nane Experience Community Hub & Library — Kibera

 Obonyo Foundation

 Otavalango Centre

 Student Energy

 UN-Habitat

 UN-Habitat Youth Advisory Board

 UNEP

 Water is Right

 Water Is Right Kenya

 YOUNGO

 Zero Waste Foundation Youth Programme

 Young Champion of the Earth (UNEP)

 Youth and Food Security Specialist
