

INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WASTE PICKERS STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The IAWP condemns the destruction and burning of waste pickers' recyclables and the detention of workers in Lagos, Nigeria

20 July 2026

The International Alliance of Waste Pickers (IAWP) condemns in the strongest terms the destruction and burning of recyclable materials belonging to informal waste pickers at Amuwo-Odofin, Lagos State, Nigeria, and the detention of workers during the enforcement operation.

We stand in full solidarity with our affiliate, the Association of Scraps and Wastepickers of Lagos (ASWOL), and with every worker whose livelihood was destroyed.

The materials burned in Amuwo-Odofin represented months of collection, sorting and aggregation. Their destruction has plunged affected families into hardship overnight, wiping out property worth millions of naira and the daily labour behind it. This is not the removal of a nuisance. It is the destruction of legitimate work and the criminalisation of the workers who perform it.

We are equally alarmed by the detention of waste pickers in the course of this operation. We join ASWOL in demanding their immediate and unconditional release.

The action also carries a grave environmental cost. The open burning of recyclable materials releases toxic pollutants and greenhouse gases that endanger public health and accelerate environmental degradation. It is a bitter contradiction that materials recovered to keep waste out of landfills, drainage channels and the open air were themselves set alight in the name of environmental order. Waste pickers are not obstacles to a clean city. They are among its most effective, and least recognised, environmental service providers.

Around the world, waste pickers recover more than 100 million tonnes of waste every year, reducing emissions, conserving resources and sustaining the circular economy at almost no public cost. What happened in Lagos is not an isolated incident. It is part of a global pattern in which enforcement campaigns, dumpsite closures and "clean-up" operations fall hardest on the workers who make recycling possible, treating recovery as a crime rather than a public service.



Environmental enforcement and cleaner cities are legitimate goals. They must never be pursued at the expense of the livelihoods of those already making an invaluable contribution to waste management. A just transition cannot be built by burning the work of the very people who sustain it.

The IAWP therefore calls on the Lagos State Government and the relevant authorities to:

- Release immediately and unconditionally all waste pickers detained during the operation.
- Conduct an immediate, transparent and independent investigation into the destruction and burning of the recyclable materials, and hold those responsible accountable in accordance with the law.
- Provide fair compensation to the affected waste pickers for the loss of their property and livelihoods.
- Recognise and protect informal waste pickers as legitimate environmental service providers.
- Establish clear policies that integrate the informal recycling sector into the state's waste management framework, based on collaboration rather than criminalisation.

We call on environmental organisations, climate advocates, human rights groups, trade unions, development partners and the media to stand with ASWOL and the waste pickers of Lagos in demanding justice and accountability.

The IAWP reaffirms its commitment to defending the rights, dignity and livelihoods of waste pickers everywhere. Protecting those rights strengthens, rather than weakens, any credible environmental agenda.

Justice for waste pickers is justice for the environment.

International Alliance of Waste Pickers (IAWP)

