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For Immediate Release

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**The Mississippi River Plastic Pollution Initiative Has Been Selected as a Finalist
for UNEP's Environmental Impact Award**

Washington, DC. October 6, 2022 – The Mississippi River Plastic Pollution Initiative has been selected as one of four finalists for UNEP's Kipepeo Award for Environmental Impact. Launched in 2021, the annual award recognizes UNEP teams and projects demonstrating exceptional efforts, performance, and dedication to achieve organizational goals. The award celebrates the great work, innovation, and milestones achieved by these teams.

"The plastic pollution initiative with MRCTI has provided my city valuable data to inform our stormwater management plan and more accurately deploy hardware that will reliably remove solid waste from our waterways before it reaches the Mississippi River," explained **Sharon West Broome, Mayor of Baton Rouge, LA and immediate past co-chair of MRCTI.**

The [Mississippi River Plastic Pollution Initiative](#) was launched by UNEP in 2020 in collaboration with the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI), the University of Georgia's Debris Tracker, and other local and national partners.

"We are so proud to be partnering with cities throughout the Mississippi River Valley on this important initiative," said **Barbara Hendrie, Director, UNEP North America Office.** "With just 9% of all plastic being recycled globally, the work that we are doing in the region has a direct connection with the global actions that we are taking to address the problem of plastic pollution worldwide."

Approximately 11 million metric tons of plastic enter the oceans each year, with rivers contributing to a significant portion of that amount. In 2016, the U.S. generated 42.0Mt of plastic waste, the largest amount of any country in the world, and was the third largest contributor of mismanaged plastic waste to the coastal environment globally.

"A citizen science approach has allowed the communities to collect data to inform solutions to plastic pollution," said **Jenna Jambeck, Distinguished Professor in Environmental Engineering at the University of Georgia.** "The scale of this would be impossible without the participation of thousands of community members and the data is open, accessible, and belongs to all."

This ground-breaking initiative generates a first-ever snapshot of the state of plastic pollution along the Mississippi River to aid decision-makers in both the private and public sectors in judging the success of their efforts to reduce plastic pollution flowing into the river, and ultimately into the ocean.

To date, plastic pollution data has been collected in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; St. Louis, Missouri; St. Paul, Minnesota; Quad Cities, Iowa/Illinois; and the Mississippi Delta Region (Greenville and Rosedale, Mississippi). This last phase was undertaken thanks to the generous support of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Given the meaning of Kipepeo, the Swahili word for butterfly, known as a symbol of transformation and renewal, the Mississippi River Plastic Pollution Initiative embodies the spirit of the award and is an example of the different levels and scale of intervention needed to ensure social wellbeing and environmental justice.

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The Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI)

The Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI) is a coalition of 102 mayors from along the Mississippi River Corridor, which spans ten states. The Mississippi River provides drinking water to more than 20 million people and 50 cities. The river's resources support 1.5 million jobs and nearly \$500 billion in annual revenue. <https://www.mrcti.org/>

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

UNEP is the leading global voice on the environment. It provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. More information on the initiative can be found at www.unep.org/mississippi. <https://www.unep.org/regions/north-america>

About University of Georgia's Debris Tracker

The Marine Debris Tracker is a free mobile app designed to help community members make a difference by contributing data on plastic pollution. Developed in 2010 in partnership with the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and currently supported by Morgan Stanley, the Debris Tracker community is creating a bigger picture of marine debris and plastic pollution through collecting open data, generating scientific findings, informing policy, and inspiring upstream design. Over 4 million items have been logged to date. <https://debristracker.org/>