



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Japan and South Africa Share Waste Management Knowledge at Sustainable Waste Management Seminar**

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#### **Immediate Release**

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Waste management is a challenge faced by every country on every continent in the world. Issues faced by South Africa, while somewhat unique, can certainly benefit from the leanings of those in other parts of the world. Japan and South Africa recently shared their knowledge and experience at a recent Sustainable Waste Management Seminar hosted by UCT and endorsed by the Institute of Waste Management of South Africa (IWMSA).

On Tuesday 26 November, the University of Cape Town hosted a seminar on Sustainable Waste Management, organised by UCT's Engineering Department, the Japanese Embassy in South Africa and Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO). The seminar, endorsed by the IWMSA, National Recycling Forum, and Greencape, is one of a series of conversations happening between South Africa and other countries, which IWMSA President Dr Susan Oelefse believes is vital to making a real

difference in the waste management arena.

“Waste management is a global concern,” says Dr Oelofse. “No two countries share exactly the same challenges and events like these allow us to share our unique knowledge and experience, and learn from the experience and expertise of others.”

The Seminar was well-attended and featured five key note speakers, including two Japanese speakers - Mr Michikazu Kojima, the Director of Environment and Natural Resource Studies Group at Institute of Developing Economies in JETRO, who spoke on various aspects of waste management, including collection, recycling and the fascinating “Eco Towns” in Japan; and Ms Akiko Robinson, from the CFP Corporation in Japan. Ms Angela Blake from JETRO’s Johannesburg office shared some of JETRO’s innovative waste management activities, while independent consultant and Waste Management Specialist Susanne Karcher from EnviroSense, discussed the waste management challenges faced by Cape Town today.

Also in attendance was UCT’s own Professor Harro Von Blottnitz from the Chemical Engineering Department, who shared some of his students’ work on life cycle assessment of plastics recycling in Cape Town.

In the opening address, Minister Counsellor Yukio Yoshii asked why Japan is today considered one of the world’s most environmentally advanced nations. He then went on to explain that historically Japan was one of the most environmentally damaged nations and that concerted efforts were required to combat the effects of the environmental damage caused by rapid economic growth. He also pointed out that over the next three years, Japan will spend \$2 billion in development assistance in areas such as air

pollution, water pollution and waste management.

Many other interesting points were made during the seminar. Susanne Karcher, an integrated resource and waste minimisation specialist, discussed the issues facing South Africa and in particular, the effects of urbanisation on waste. Karcher also made an extremely interesting point about the definition of “waste” and noted that in many instances, what some might consider waste, could be considered to be material by others. Karcher proposed that we relook the definition of waste and pay special attention to making a distinction between “waste” and “material”. She also pointed out that the reason there is so much waste is because we keep “buying things we don’t need with money we don’t have to impress neighbours we don’t like”.

Ms Akiko Robinson from the CFP Corporation in Japan, spoke about the opportunities that exist for converting plastics into fuel, in order to aid sustainable waste management. She proposed that instead of sending plastics to landfill sites, the plastic be cleaned in a special “washing machine” and then separated into many different categories of plastics. She explained that while PA, PET and PVC products cannot be converted to oil, PP, PE and PS plastics can. Three other types of plastics can further be converted in various products – LDPE plastic can be used to make pallets and other building materials; PET plastics can be turned into fibre for making clothes and shoes; and PP plastics can be turned into containers.

In his closing remarks, Professor Harro von Blottnitz reflected on the value of the workshop and the symbolism of having hosted it in UCT’s new engineering building, home to both Civil and Chemical Engineers. In his assessment, the challenges of achieving sustainable waste management

solutions and getting really good at reducing, reusing and recycling, require a 'new kind of engineer': one who can avoid ecologically unintelligent product designs and poor operating practises, and one who has the cultural competencies to learn from the successes of others – of which the Japanese team presented plenty.

“While South Africa still has a long way to go to creating a sustainable waste management system, we are constantly learning from the experiences of those dealing with similar issues in other countries and on other continents,” says Melani Traut, IWMSA Western Cape Chairman. “The IWMSA is actively seeking out synergies and discussions on effective and sustainable waste management. We are especially looking forward to the 2014 WasteCon, the largest waste management conference in Africa, which will be proudly hosted by Cape Town.”

For more information on the IWMSA visit [www.iwmsa.co.za](http://www.iwmsa.co.za)

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