Fast fashion brands funding war in Ukraine

International NGOs host COP panel on the link between Russian oil and fast fashion manufacturing

Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt (November 16, 2022)–Today Changing Markets Foundation, Stand.earth and the Zero Waste Alliance Ukraine hosted a panel discussion on a recently released report linking Russian oil to the supply chain of clothing sold by major fashion brands around the world. While many countries have imposed sanctions, and many fashion companies have ceased operations in Russia, they are still indirectly funding the war through their reliance on synthetic fibres.

The majority of clothing made by the fashion industry is synthetic and made from fossil fuels. The report ‘Dressed to Kill - Fashion brands’ hidden links to Russian oil in a time of war’ lists 39 global brands – including Nike, Columbia Sportswear, Levi Strauss & Co., Target, North Face and Wrangler – which are linked through their polyester supply chains to two of the world’s largest polyester manufacturers which have significantly increased their sourcing of Russian oil for fibre production.

Head of Zero Waste LV Iryna Myronova pointed out that Ukraine is suffering twice at the hands of fast fashion. Ukraine is the fifth biggest importer of second hand clothing, and its waste burden has been exacerbated since the beginning of the war as unsuitable polyester clothing brought in as part of humanitarian aid piles up in warehouses.

Changing Markets Foundation calls for complete transparency from fashion brands with regard to the use of synthetic fibres, and commitment to phase them out with a 20% reduction set to a 2021 baseline in the use of fossil fuel-based materials by 2025 and a 50% reduction by 2030.

Some comments from the panelists are below:

“The fashion brands’ growing addiction to fossil fuels is driving climate and waste crises and also funding Russia’s bloody war in Ukraine through the backdoor. It is high time to hold these companies accountable, so that they can invest their creativity into cleaning up their supply chains and moving away from fossil fashion,” Nusa Urbancic, Campaigns Director at Changing Markets Foundations, said.

“This is a call for everyone to look at this report and spread the word to stop buying fast fashion, as it is funding not only the war in Ukraine, but is also funding Russia’s military activity in the Middle East and Africa,” Iryna Myronova, Head of Zero Waste LV (Ukraine) said.

“The staggering growth of the fashion industry is built on fossil fuels. Fossil fuels are deeply embedded in the industry’s manufacturing, and brands are not doing enough to change that. Brands should commit to phase out fossil fuel-derived materials, kick out coal, and strive for 100% clean renewable energy across their supply chains by 2030” said Rachel Kitchin, Corporate Climate Campaigner at Stand.earth.

“This report highlights why corporates need to implement traceability and transparency. Investors no longer accept, for example, conflict minerals or modern slavery in their supply chains; it’s often against the law. If a brand says it doesn’t know where its products are coming from, it’s likely to be because it doesn’t have a system – which is surprising; it doesn’t want to
tell you; or it doesn’t care. Investors should be demanding traceability and transparency now.”
John Willis, Director of Research, Planet Tracker, said.

Link to report
Link to US press release
Link to UK press release

Contact:
George Harding-Rolls, Changing Markets, george.harding-rolls@changingmarkets.org
Emily Pomilio, Stand.earth Corporate Campaigns, emily@eriksongroup.com

Changing Markets Foundation:
The Changing Markets Foundation was formed to accelerate and scale up solutions to sustainability challenges by leveraging the power of markets. Working in partnership with NGOs, other foundations and research organizations, we create and support campaigns that shift market share away from unsustainable products and companies and towards environmentally and socially beneficial solutions.

About Stand.earth
Stand is an advocacy organization that brings people together to demand that corporations and governments put people and the environment first.

About Zero Waste Alliance Ukraine

About Planet Tracker
Planet Tracker is a non-profit financial think tank producing analytics and reports to align capital markets with planetary boundaries.