

June 2013

	منظمة الأغذية والزراعة للأمم المتحدة	联合国 粮食及 农业组织	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'alimentation et l'agriculture	Продовольственная и сельскохозяйственная организация Объединенных Наций	Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Alimentación y la Agricultura
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# Global Soil Partnership Plenary Assembly

## First session

Rome, 11-12 June 2013

World Soil Day and International Year of Soils 2015

### Executive Summary

- Two key awareness raising instruments were actively considered in the context of the GSP and have been duly addressed in FAO Governing Bodies, i.e. the annual observance of a World Soil Day (on 5 December) and the declaration of 2015 as International Year of Soils. Proposals in this regard are in the final stage of formal endorsement by the FAO Conference and the UN General Assembly as applicable. It is expected that, once approved, these events should greatly contribute not only to raising awareness about soil as an essential, finite and non-renewable natural resource, but also to mobilizing the international community to act towards its sustainable management. This document briefly recounts the development of these proposals and their present status.

### Suggested action by the GSP Plenary Assembly

- The Plenary Assembly may wish to:
  - a) Confirm full support to proposals for World Soil Day and the International Year of Soils 2015, pending consideration at the upcoming 38<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Conference.
  - b) Endorse the organization of a side event for the World Soil Day celebration on 5 December 2013 and suggest potential topics and strategies to foster its aims.
  - c) Request the Secretariat that, in case of a positive outcome in the concerned Bodies, to ensure maximum impact of these key awareness raising platforms.

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## I. World Soil Day

- 1) The prime justifications for the GSP were placed at the forefront of its Terms of Reference and warrant recalling: “Soil is a finite natural resource and is non renewable on a human time-scale. Soils are also the foundation of agricultural development and ecosystem sustainability, and provide the basis for food, feed, fuel and fibre production, clean water, nutrient cycles, organic carbon stocks, one quarter of global biodiversity, and also serve as a platform and source for construction. Despite the essential role of soils in the life of humanity, their degradation is increasing due to inappropriate practices, growing population pressures and inadequate governance of this essential natural resource.”
- 2) The International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS)<sup>1</sup> adopted in 2002 a resolution to propose to designate 5 December as World Soil Day. This date was chosen to honour His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadej, King of Thailand, for his untiring efforts in the promotion of soil science and soil resources conservation and sustainable management.
- 3) The "Global Soil Partnership" is also in itself a major advocacy instrument to foster greater international recognition of the importance of soils for achieving sustainable food security, as well as their pivotal role in the survival and growth of healthy ecosystems.
- 4) Going beyond that, FAO Members expressed support to the recognition of 5 December as World Soil Day (during a presentation made at the 144th Session of the FAO Council of June 2012 and subsequently at the 145th Session of December 2012) and requested to institutionalize its observance according to UN system practice. Activities in connection with the observance of World Soil Day by national governments, international and national organizations and civil society should greatly assist in raising awareness about soil as an essential, finite and non-renewable natural resource and mobilizing the international community to act towards its sustainable management.
- 5) Accordingly, in its 145th Session the Council formally approved (CL 145/11 Rev.1; CL 145/PV/5; CL 145/PV/7) the proposal to establish a World Soil Day as a major platform for raising awareness. The Council requested that a Draft Resolution be submitted for adoption to the 38th Session of the FAO Conference in June 2013, calling on the Director-General to transmit the Resolution to the United Nations General Assembly in order to institutionalize the annual observance of World Soil Day on 5 December.
- 6) It is worth mentioning that, during the 145th Session of FAO Council, the Secretariat organized a side event on: “Securing healthy soils for a food secure world” with high level participation. The issue of outdated global soil information preventing reliable food security projections, was highlighted with calls for action to address it.

## II. International Year of Soils 2015

- 1) Within the framework of the GSP, the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand also proposed the celebration of an International Year of Soils (IYS). “Healthy soils for a healthy life” was proposed as a theme to raise awareness for the importance of sustainable soil management. This was initially presented to the 144th Session of the FAO Council.
- 2) At its 146th Session of April 2013, notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph 4 of the FAO Policy on the Proclamation of International Years, the FAO Council (CL 146/REP) decided to

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.iuss.org>

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make an exception to its application and endorsed the proposal of declaring 2015 the International Year of Soils. The Council agreed that a Draft Conference Resolution on the subject be submitted for adoption to the 38th Session of the Conference.

- 3) The Secretariat has invited support from partners to both World Soil Day and the International Year of Soils 2015 as part of work under Pillar 2 of the GSP, pending their formal approval by the concerned Bodies. In case both proposals are finally approved by the Conference and the UN General Assembly, the GSP Secretariat is expected to act as Secretariat for these events so as to facilitate their successful observance.