

**Opening remarks by H.E. Mr. Virachai Plasai,
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Thailand to the UN
World Soil Day 2017:**

Caring for the planet starts from the ground

Tuesday 5 December 2017, 13.15 – 14.30 hrs.

Conference Room 8, United Nations Headquarters, New York

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Good afternoon and a very warm welcome to the celebration of World Soil Day 2017.

2. The event today is jointly hosted by the Permanent Missions of Colombia, the Kingdom of Lesotho, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and the Kingdom of Thailand, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), with the participation of GRACE Initiative from the civil society and the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils from the academia.

3. This year is the fourth consecutive year we celebrate this special occasion, since the UNGA68 adopted in 2013 a resolution designating 5 December, the Birthday of His Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand, the World Soil Day, following a resolution on the same matter adopted earlier by the FAO in 2012 in recognition of His Majesty's lifelong work to promote soil science and soil resources

conservation. This year, events are being organized all around the world to celebrate the occasion, including in Rome, Nairobi, Moscow, Santiago, and Bangkok.

4. Under this year's theme "Caring for the planet starts from the ground", we are here today to underline the vital importance of soils for humankind. To name but a few reasons, soils are the basis for over 95 percent of global food production, the key provider of nutrients in our food, the purifier of fresh water for our consumption, the largest carbon sink on earth, the host to a quarter of the planet's biodiversity, and the source of fuels and energy.

5. We are indeed alarmed by the fact that soils are now under grave threats due to a number of man-made factors, such as improper land utilization, poor land management, increased use of pesticides and harmful plant protection products in agriculture, deforestation, and of course climate change. This has caused land degradation, soil erosion, rapid reduction in soil productivity, and desertification, which in turn threaten human well-being.

6. We, the UN family, governments, private sector, civil society, individuals, and all other stakeholders, need to raise awareness and step up efforts to conserve, preserve and restore the soils. We must also use and manage our soils in a more responsible and sustainable manner, in line with the related ongoing efforts to ensure food security, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and preservation of our biodiversity and ecosystems.

7. We must also have regard to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which reaffirms such nexus in several of the Goals and Targets. These include SDG15, particularly Target 15.3, which calls for combatting desertification and restoring degraded land and soil, SDG2, particularly Target 2.4, on sustainable food production systems and agricultural practices, SDG Target 3.9 on reduction of hazardous impact of soil pollution and contamination, SDG7 on energy supply and SDG12 on sustainable production and consumption, particularly Target 12.4 on reduction of release of chemicals and wastes to soil.

8. Soil conservation, preservation, restoration and sequestration of carbon into soils will put us in a far better position to meet these Goals and Targets by 2030.

9. For our discussion today, I would like to highlight 2 points.

10. First, leadership at the national level is crucial in guaranteeing the success of our efforts on soils. As for my country, Thai people are truly blessed to have the legacy of the works of His Majesty the late King Bhumibol, which was initially aimed at helping farmers and villagers in the rural areas. Efforts were mobilized in the entire nation in pursuit of this important agenda, which also benefitted several other sectors, such as the industry, health, and the environment. A selection of His Majesty's works are exhibited here as a special tribute to his lifelong dedication and advocacy for sustainable soil management.

11. Second, international cooperation both at the regional and global levels, as well as collaboration with relevant partners should be

further scaled-up and leveraged. In Asia, the 24-member Asian Soil Partnership, with Thailand as Chair, has been working closely with the FAO for the cause of sustainable soil management for all. Thailand also spearheaded the establishment of the Center of Excellence on Soil Research in Asia, as a regional platform for exchange and sharing of innovative techniques in this field. In addition, under South-South and Triangular Cooperation programmes, Thailand has been working with the FAO to share with other developing countries the Thai home-grown approach to sustainable development through soil conservation, based on His Majesty King Bhumibol's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. We look forward to expanding similar partnership with all interested parties.

12. I thank the co-host countries and organizations and look forward to hearing the perspectives and experiences of their representatives. I am confident that with the wealth of expertise and knowledge of our panellists, we will have a stimulating and fruitful discussion today. I hope that the celebration of World Soil Day here in New York and elsewhere around the world will foster greater awareness and understanding on the importance of soils, and in the substance contribute to future work on this topic, including at the next High Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July next year, during which implementation of SDG15 will be reviewed in-depth.

13. I thank you.
