

## **SPEECH – OPENING OF THE GLOBAL SOIL PARTNERSHIP GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

First, I would like to thank Dr. José Graziano da Silva for the invitation. It is a great pleasure and honor for me and for the Federal Court of Accounts of Brazil, which I am representing as a Vice President, to attend such an important event.

As you all know, soil is an essential resource for life. It is in the core of the main challenges faced by the planet: production of food, fibers and energy, in addition to the delivery of environmental services. It also has a fundamental role in mitigation of the effects of climate change, maintenance of water springs and in sustaining biodiversity.

Despite this relevance for food production, water, forests, protection of biodiversity, etc., the soil is normally considered as a given resource. Much thought is given to these different sectors and discussions are carried out but, in general, the soil is usually not included in the debates. There has been an increasing degradation of soils, with repercussion in all mentioned fields, however little has been done to change this situation and to effectively insert it in public policies related to the sectors to which it is connected.

Fortunately, the international community is awakening to the threats concerning the soils of the planet and to the challenges that lie before us. The greatest example of this is the creation of the Global Soil Partnership by the FAO. Despite the short time of formation of this alliance, the relevant work this group is doing shows the correctness of this initiative.

As we all know, we're living a moment of construction of a post-2015 development agenda. I believe that all efforts should be made in order to include soil in the sustainable development goals, showing clearly the relevance of an adequate soil management.

Another important initiative was taken by the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS). The Institute held two editions of the Global Soil Week, which is an important forum for the discussion of several aspects related to this matter.

In fact, in the first edition of the Global Soil Week, held in end of 2012, a small group of Brazilians and I, sensitized by the importance of this subject, thought it would be extremely appropriate to bring this discussion to Brazil. After all, in a country with such continental features as ours – at the same time an agricultural, mineral and environmental power - sustainable usage of this important natural resource is especially relevant.

It was understood that the Federal Court of Accounts (TCU), due to its constitutional mandate, should lead this process. I accepted the challenge of bringing to my peers the proposal of holding an event in Brazil to discuss the soil issue, focusing on governance, in line with our constitutional mission of contributing to the improvement of public administration for the benefit of society.

It is important to emphasize that the role of the Federal Court of Accounts is not only to oversee the sound use of federal resources according to the Brazilian legal framework, but also to assess the efficacy and effectiveness of public policies. In this last aspect of its performance, the Court has a strong role in promoting improvement of Federal Government actions.

It is relevant to note that, from the moment the idea was launched, we had immediate support and commitment from several Brazilian institutions that perform in areas directly connected to soils. Some examples are the Brazilian Company of Agricultural Research (Embrapa), Brazilian Society for Soil Science, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply, Ministry of Environment, Itaipu Binacional, Bank of Brazil, the National Confederation of Agriculture, and the National Water Agency.



All these institutions are working with us to design and organize the conference. One of the members of the committee responsible for technically structuring the event is Dr. Maria de Lourdes Mendonça Santos, an expert member of the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils of the Global Soil Partnership.

We are also holding dialogues with several segments of the Brazilian society who perform in areas connected to soils, in the governmental, entrepreneurial and academic areas, and also in civil society, so we can have broad and plural discussions in the event.

The conference will also have an international dimension, because many problems related to the soil are of a global nature. It will also allow us to learn from good experiences that have been adopted in other countries.

I had the opportunity to present the proposal of the event to the Chief Executive of IASS, Dr. Klaus Töpfer, who fully supported the idea. The team responsible for the organization of the Global Soil Week has stayed in touch with us and has already been to Brazil, sharing their experience and helping us design the event.

We have also had previous contact with the Latin American Society of Soil Science, which is already working to organize a session that will bring a regional perspective on relevant aspects related to this thematic.

I was pleased to know that, last year, the UN General Assembly stated that 2015 would be the International Year of Soils, motivated by many concerns that brought us to hold the Soil Governance Conference. We humbly expect that our event, alongside many other initiatives that will certainly be carried out, may contribute to the achievement of objectives pursued by the United Nations next year.

We invite Global Soil Partnership to join us in this task. I believe that the goals of our event are aligned with the group's mandate of improving the governance of limited soil resources of the planet in order to guarantee healthy and productive soils for a safer world regarding food and to provide support to essential environmental services. We are open to interact and receive suggestions so that our initiative may achieve better possible results.

The conference has three main objectives:

- Make society aware of the importance of sustainable usage of soils and the consequences for policies related to sustainable development;
- Present successful initiatives related to soil management that could point the way for public policies related to this subject;
- Make recommendations and suggestions to the responsible institutions in order to improve governance mechanisms.

It will be a three-day event, from March 25 to 27, 2015, and it will be structured around four themes, namely:

- Knowledge of soil and institutionality;
- Vulnerability of the soil in face of climate changes, desertification and extreme events;
- Sustainability of Agricultural and Livestock Production, Food Safety and Environmental Services;
- Territorial Governance.



The program will consist of parallel discussion sessions of specific subjects in each theme. Authorities of national and international renown will also be invited to make presentations on important topics in the area. This is the basic structure of the event, but it is still under construction. Proposals for specific sessions are being gathered and may be made by any institution performing in areas related to soils who suggest discussions that are aligned with the objectives of the conference. As I mentioned before, we are open to contributions from this group, which will certainly enhance our event and help to the achievement of its goals.

I would like to invite you to attend our event next year, which will be held in Brasília, Brazil.

I hope the three days of debates are productive for all of you and that we may create an international year of soils that will make a real difference in changing the current scenario.

Finally, I thank FAO and Dr. Graziano for the invitation and Dr. Maria Laura da Rocha, our Ambassador in FAO, for being here.