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Opening remarks

**by Mr. Rapibhat Chandarasrivongs, Acting Chairman of ASP
at the 4th Asian Soil Partnership workshop**

25th May 2018 at National Convention Center, Beijing, China

Mr. Zhao Yongzhi, Director of Beijing Soil Fertilizer Extension Service Station,

Mr. Eduardo Mansur, Director Land and Water Division, FAO,

National Focal Points of ASP,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and gentlemen.

As Chair of the Asian Soil Partnership, it is my distinct honour to welcome you all to this 4th Asian Soil Partnership workshop.

Allow me to start by thanking the Chinese government, and especially the Beijing Municipal Agriculture Bureau and the Beijing Soil Fertilizer Extension Service Station, for hosting the 24 countries in our partnership here in Beijing, and the GSP Secretariat for facilitating the organization of our annual meeting. Thank you for making this meeting possible.

Our 4th Asian Soil Partnership workshop this year coincides with the International Symposium on Soil Health and Sustainable Development – A Strategy for “The Belt and Road”. By looking at tackling global challenges and achieving sustainable development through the protection of the environment and the modernization of agriculture, the topic of the symposium and the work of the Belt and Road Initiative very well match with the objectives that the Asian Soil Partnership has on soil. This complementarity is further highlighted by the attention that the symposium is giving to the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management, which you know being in our regional implementation plan.

The ASP is a key player for the achievement of sustainable soil management and sustainable development in Asia. Our work allows national institutions on soil to cooperate, soil scientists to exchange knowledge and experience, and ultimately governments to report on and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Our work is based on a volunteering basis, on consultative processes, and to a common hope for the future. Therefore, I would like to thank you all, dear colleagues from ASP member countries, for believing and investing in our partnership.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate with China for hosting the International Network of Black Soil (INBS). I firmly believe that INBS will serve as a platform for knowledge

sharing and technical cooperation on black soil management. As Chair of the ASP, allow me to express the full support of the ASP to the implementation of the network and to the organization of the First Conference on Black Soil.

This year, ASEAN guideline on soil and nutrient management were launched during ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Forestry in Thailand in September 2017. This is a great achievement for the South East Asian sub-region, which further recognized the importance of preserving our precious soil resources from degradation. But soil degradation due to urban growth, the conversion of forests into farmland and the practice of unsustainable soil management, does not only apply to ASEAN countries. It is our hope that these guidelines, together with the principles in the revised World Soil Charter, the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management, and the Code of Conduct for the Management of Fertilizers, currently under discussion at the GSP Secretariat, will serve all Asian countries to develop sustainably.

Our attention should also be paid to the restoration and remediation of degraded soils and to the management of the abandoned ones, so to halt the fragmentation of the landscape and the land use changes.

Dear colleagues,

We achieved a lot since the ASP was established in 2017, national soil organic carbon maps were developed, national soil laboratories joint SEALNET, our Regional Soil Laboratory Network, the writing of the Soil Atlas of Asia started, and many other activities on soil were launched at the national level thanks to your work and facilitation. But much more has to come. During this meeting, we are called to identify activities to implement in the next biennium and to decide on the establishment of our regional Centre of Excellence for Soil Research (CESRA), which should serve as a centre of knowledge, research and dissemination on soil information and relevant knowledge in Asia. During our last meeting in 2016, Thailand volunteered to host the Center. Following your expression of support towards this proposal, a concept note was developed and will be herewith discussed. It is our hope that CESRA will serve as one of the most important channels to support ASP actions on the five pillars of the Asian Soil Partnership implementation plan.

To conclude, I would like to thank the GSP Secretariat not only for their role in today's meeting, but for their commitment in developing a strong partnership like we are, and for supporting the development of many Asian countries. This includes their commendable efforts in enhancing collaboration and synergy of actions between stakeholders as well as in improving soil governance and advocating for the practice of sustainable soil management.

As you know, this year the mandate of Thailand as Chair of the Asian Soil Partnership is coming to an end, together with that of the ASP Chairs for the five Pillars of Action. It has been a great honour to serve you all and, if you will allow us to, it will be a great honour for Thailand to continue leading you towards the achievement of sustainable development for another term.

Thanks for your attention.