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para la
Alimentación y la
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CONFERENCE

Thirty-eighth Session

Rome, 15-22 June 2013

Observance of the World Soil Day

Executive Summary

- Soils are the foundation of agricultural development and ecosystem sustainability. They 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. However, soil is also a finite natural resource and is non renewable on a human time-scale. 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. Maintaining healthy soils is a priority for feeding the growing population and meeting their needs for biomass (energy), fibre, fodder, and other products that can only be ensured through collective efforts by the global community.
- At its 145th Session, the Council approved the proposal to establish the Observance of a World Soil Day to be celebrated on 5 December, and requested that a draft resolution be submitted to the Conference at its 38th Session for approval.

Suggested action by the Conference

The Conference is invited to:

- Consider the draft resolution in annex to this document and decide whether to approve the Observance of the World Soil Day on 5 December as a platform for raising awareness on the importance of soils for food security and eco-system functions.

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I. Background

1. Recognizing the critical role of soils for food security and ecosystem services, on the basis of the recommendation by the FAO High-Level External Committee (HLEC) on the Millennium Development Goals to the Director-General (13-14 October 2009) and through discussions during, and conclusions reached, at the 22nd Committee on Agriculture (COAG) (Rome, 16-19 June 2010), FAO was requested to establish a Global Soil Partnership¹. After preparatory, participatory and inclusive work by FAO, the COAG, at its 23rd session (21-25 May 2012), endorsed the initiative of the establishment of the Global Soil Partnership following the expressions of support by a broad range of countries.
2. Given the importance of soils, in 2002 the International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS)² adopted a resolution to propose 5 December as World Soil Day. The purpose of the endorsement of World Soil Day by FAO Council is to celebrate the importance of soil as a critical component of food security and ecosystems health and as a vital contributor to human wellbeing through its contribution to food, water and energy security and in mitigating biodiversity loss and climate change. At present, the World Soil Day is celebrated mainly by the global community of some 60 000 soil scientists charged with responsibility of generating and communicating knowledge and understanding of the key role of soils in supporting life and agricultural production on the earth.
3. Despite the commendable efforts by the IUSS and the soil scientists globally, soils are often perceived as a low priority item in national and global decision making processes. Indeed, degradation of soils is a silent process that does not attract the attention of decision makers. Yet soils are clearly the key to addressing the current and future pressures of a growing population. Recognition, advocacy and support for promoting sustainable management of soils is the only alternative if the international community is going to guarantee healthy soils for a food secure world based on stable and sustainable ecosystems.
4. Within the framework of the "Global Soil Partnership", FAO advocates international recognition of the importance of soils for achieving sustainable food security, as well as for its pivotal role in helping to enable the survival and growth of healthy ecosystems.
5. Following the Rio+20 Conference, it is evident that there is an urgent need to raise awareness and to promote and facilitate actions towards the sustainable management of soils in order to reach the agreed sustainable development goals of a zero-hunger and land-degradation neutral world.
6. FAO, through the Global Soil Partnership, under the leadership of Thailand, the Asian Regional Group and G77 and China, and with support of their members as expressed during a presentation made at the 144th Session of the FAO Council (11-15 June 2012), and as decided at its 145th Session (2-7 December 2013) are requesting the UN system to recognize 5 December as World Soil Day and institutionalize its observance accordingly. Activities such as the Observance of World Soil Day by national governments, international and national organizations and civil society will assist in raising awareness and achieving recognition for soil as an essential, finite and non-renewable natural resource and to mobilize the international community to actions towards its sustainable management.

¹ CL 140/3

² <http://www.iuss.org>

Resolution ____/2013**THE CONFERENCE**

Noting the importance of soil as a critical component of food security and ecosystems health and as a vital contributor to human wellbeing through its contribution to food, water and energy security and in mitigating biodiversity loss and climate change;

Recognizing that soil degradation is an alarming process that threatens global soil resources and therefore risks to compromise the achievement of sustainable development including the Millennium Development Goals, hunger eradication and poverty reduction;

Affirming that soils are clearly the key to addressing the current and future pressures of a growing population and that recognition, advocacy and support for promoting sustainable management of soils is the only alternative to ensure that the international community is able in the future to guarantee healthy soils for a food secure world based on stable and sustainable ecosystems;

Recalling the urgent need to raise awareness and to promote and facilitate actions towards sustainable management of soils, in order to reach the agreed sustainable development goals of a zero-hunger and land-degradation neutral world as stated at the Rio+20 Conference;

Affirming the urgent need of raising public awareness on the importance of soils for food security and ecosystem functions:

- 1) **Requests** the Director-General to transmit this Resolution to the Secretary-General of the United Nations with a view to having the General Assembly of the United Nations consider declaring 5 December as the World Soil Day at its next session.

Adopted on June 2013