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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON WORLD SOIL DAY

5 December 2016

In a modern world where the population is growing, cities are expanding, the climate is changing and more food is needed, we urgently need healthy soils to ensure the essential services they provide.

Sustainable management systems and practices will unlock the full potential of soils to support food production, store and supply clean water, preserve biodiversity, sequester more carbon and increase resilience to a changing climate.

Sustainable soil management will also advance progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change. It should become the worldwide norm in order to optimize our use of soil now and preserve and protect it over the long term.

Pulses, also known as grain legumes, can boost soil health while supporting healthier and nutritious diets. Dry beans, peas, lentils and other pulses combine with soil in a unique symbiosis that protects the environment, enhances productivity, contributes to adapting to climate change and provides fundamental nutrients to the soil and subsequent crops. Pulses can fix atmospheric nitrogen in their roots. By freeing soil-bound phosphorous to make it accessible and usable by plants, pulses also reduce the need to apply external fertilizer. These are all drivers of sustainable development.

The international community has identified collaborative and coordinated ways to protect and sustainably manage soils. There are valuable recommendations in the recently endorsed Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management developed by the Global Soil Partnership. Following these guidelines will help pave the way to boosting the health of soil and fully unlocking its potential to support mitigation and adaptation actions in a changing climate.

On World Soil Day, I call for greater attention to the pressing issues affecting soils, including climate change, antimicrobial resistance, soil-borne diseases, contamination, nutrition and human health.

Let us build on the International Year of Soils 2015, the International Year of Pulses 2016, and all the activities supporting sustainable soil management to generate more hectares of healthy soils everywhere.