



**Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations**

A statement by FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva

5 December 2012

**Securing healthy soils for a food secure world: a day dedicated to soils
Side event to the 145th FAO Council**

Your Excellency Mr Miguel Oyono, Minister of Agriculture and Forest of Equatorial Guinea,

Your Excellency Mr Yuttapong Charasathien, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives of Thailand,

Honorable Prof. Jae Yang, President of the International Union of Soil Sciences,

Your Excellency Ambassador of Dominican Republic to FAO, Mr Mario Arvelo,

Mr Luca Montanarella, Joint Research Center, European Commission,

Ms. Ivonne Lobos, Institute of Advanced Sustainability Studies,

Honorable Prof. Wilfred Blum, former Secretary General International Union of Soil Sciences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for taking part in this event on “Securing healthy soils for a food secure world.”

This morning, the FAO Council endorsed a proposal to name today, December 5th, as World Soil Day.

The proposal will now go to the FAO Conference and then be submitted to the United Nations General Assembly.



I want to thank His Majesty, the King of Thailand, and the International Union of Soil Sciences for taking this initiative.

Hopefully, next year we will be celebrating “World Soil Day” officially.

The date has not been chosen by chance: it is a recognition of His Majesty’s work as a soil scientist. In fact, this year he received the Humanitarian Soil Science Award.

The sustainable management and use of natural resources is a key to food security. This was a clear message that came out of the recent Rio+20 Conference. I would summarize it like this:

There can be no sustainable development while millions of people still suffer from hunger.

The relationship between food security and sustainability is clearly recognized in the reviewed Strategic Framework and crosscutting Strategic Objectives that the FAO Council is considering this week.

FAO already contributes to the sustainable management of soil and land resources in many ways. It provides technical and policy support and it compiles and analyzes relevant information, producing, for example, the Soil Map of the World.

This support goes back many decades. In the 1990’s, the Soil Fertility Initiative with the World Bank raised the attention of countries in sub-Saharan Africa to the need for an integrated soil policy.

In response to requests by Members to further promote the importance of this natural resource, last year FAO launched the Global Soil Partnership. We encourage countries to take this partnership to the national level and FAO is ready to assist you in this effort.

Today, we will launch a state-of-the-art Report on global and regional soil information, the first technical report from the Global Soil Partnership.



Ladies and gentlemen,

For some time now, we have known that it can take up to one thousand years to form just one centimeter of soil. And yet, all of that can be lost in just a few minutes to degradation and erosion.

In many ways, soil is still a “hidden resource”: it is not a renewable resource and it will take generations to bring back the soil we lose.

Let me end by telling you a story:

I still remember my first class in Soil Sciences in my Agronomy University in the late sixties. The professor explained that soil was primarily made up of clay, sand and water.

He mixed those elements in a pan and threw it in the ground. Then he asked us if that mess on the floor was soil.

The answer is no. Soil is a living structure. It breathes. It lives. And it can take thousands of years to create the conditions needed to reproduce it.

That is why we need to treat it with care, as the living body it is.

I do not want to take more of your time. I am sure we will have a positive and constructive debate in this session.

I want to end by thanking His Majesty the King of Thailand and all of you here present for helping to raise awareness about such a precious and undervalued natural resource: the living soil.

Thank you.