

Seoul – World Soil Day 2016 Celebrations

On 5 December 2016, the World Soil Day (WSD) 2016 celebration was hosted by the Ministry of Environment (MOE) and the Korea Environmental Industry and Technology Institute (KEITI) in Seoul, Korea. Since the purpose of this event was to inform the public about the importance of soil as a resource, not only were soil experts and politicians invited, but also ordinary people who had not learned about soil. With a slogan, “When the Future Meets Soil”, more than 500 people participated and learned about the necessity of soil in our lives.



The event was comprised of two sessions: (1) Commemorative ceremony and (2) Soil Love Talk Concert. During the first session, personages including the Minister of Environment made opening address and congratulatory and commemorative messages. Also, sand art with popera songs and soil-themed traditional dance were performed to gain the interest of non soil experts. The Minister stressed the importance and the role of the Soil Environment Conservation Act, and shared that COP22 back in Morocco inspired him to think that research and development in soil is vital for climate change mitigation as soil captures a tremendous amount of carbon.



Prof. Winfried E.H. Blum, a former Secretary General of the International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS) and initiator of the World Soil Day, told the story of how the WSD was created. In 2002, at the 17th World Congress of Soil Science in Bangkok, Thailand, Prof. Blum addressed His Majesty Bhumibol Aduljadei, the late King of Thailand, to support IUSS in the

creation of the WSD, and the organisation chose the birthday of His Majesty, the 5th of December, knowing that the name Bhumibol stands for “Power of the Land“. After presentation of the case by the IUSS President Prof. Jae Yang from Korea at the General Assembly of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in Rome, with the support of the FAO, in December 2013, the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) in New York proclaimed the 5th of December as WSD.



In the following session, six guest speakers, invited from various countries, discussed the relationship of soil and climate change, energy, food, fibre, shelter and sustainable life. The Hon. Robert M. Hill, a former Australian Minister of Environment and Defence, and current Chairman of Australian Carbon Trust, asserted that maintaining soil condition is protecting global security, as soil is the most fundamental of enablers in the challenge to feed a global population soaring towards nine billion. In other words, soil degradation will put the food security of millions of people at risk. However, the problem is that soil degradation is not a threat that is widely appreciated by the international community. It is not as obviously apparent as polluted waterways or the drying up of rivers or streams are, but more insidious and cumulative. The loss of sequestered carbon within soil to the atmosphere will lead to anthropogenic climate change. Soils which naturally act as a carbon sink no longer do so as in an undisturbed system. Mr. Hill however insisted that it is possible to return carbon to soils, restore soil condition and provide soil security. What this requires is public information and education,



good science and agricultural practice, a new generation public policy and a major capital investment.



Director Tae-Seung Kim from the National Institute of Environmental Research pointed out in his speech, “Sound Soil and Residential Environment” that growth of city populations has led to larger and larger areas of soil being covered by asphalted roads and buildings and that has been deteriorating the proper function of soil.

Moreover, Director Kim explained about Soil Environment Conservation Act, which is similar to Environmental Site Assessment to some extent. This law aims to enable citizens to live in a healthy environment by clarifying who is responsible for soil remediation after investigating the status and scope of soil contamination and before trade of land that could have been contaminated. Lastly, he attracted people’s attention to the fact that soil should be looked after, as it requires a significantly long period of time and a huge amount of money to recover soil.



Also participating in the event was famous Korean actress Jin-Hee Park, who is not a soil expert but has been actively involved in numerous environment-related events organised by the



government. She encouraged people to join her in protecting the environment by practicing environmentally friendly activities in their daily lives like she has been doing. For instance, she uses cloth diapers for her two-year-old daughter and does not use wet wipes or shampoo or bodywash. Furthermore, she shared that producing one T-shirt costs 2,700 litres of water, and clothing companies dump a huge amount of unsold clothes every year. Thus, even though she needs to be trendy and wear brand new clothes in every season as an actress, she tries not to buy clothes but wears the same dress at formal meetings or events unlike the other stars.



Jin-Hee Park stated that it may be too hard to spend our time in taking care of the soil or the environment right now, or to change all our habits to eco-friendly activities immediately. We can start by carrying tumblers and using less water for washing dishes or taking a shower three days a week at first. These small practices of one person might not bring about huge change to the environment, but if we all try little by little, the world will be more and more sustainable.