

**PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE
GLOBAL SOIL PARTNERSHIP
(Second session, 22-24 July 2014, FAO Headquarters)
Opening Statement by Ms. Semedo
Deputy Director-General for Natural Resources**

Mr. Chairperson,
Excellency Minister Aroldo Cedraz,
Excellencies,
Dear participants to this Plenary Assembly of the Global Soil Partnership,

On behalf of the FAO Director General, José Graziano Da Silva, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you today at FAO. Your presence is a bold sign that the Global Soil Partnership is rapidly maturing from its modest early steps to meet its challenging mandate.

As you know, 95% of our food production is soils-based, and therefore, world food security depends on fertile soils. If our world is to assure sustained food production and ecosystem services provision for future generation's healthy soils has to constitute a major priority. Moreover, the just recently released IPCC reports indicate that Carbon sequestration in agricultural soils has a potential to significantly contribute to climate change mitigation.

I certainly do not need to convince this audience that soils are the foundation of agricultural development and ecological sustainability and that comprehensive action is needed at all levels: internationally, regionally, nationally and especially locally, to reverse alarming soil degradation trends.

Achieving food security for all is at the heart of FAO's mission. Thus healthy soils constitute a major priority for us and FAO has therefore fully embedded "The Global Soil Partnership" into its new FAO Strategic Framework.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The first session of the Plenary Assembly convened in June 2013 laid the groundwork for effective functioning of the Global Soil Partnership and at this Assembly, During you will deliberate on activities undertaken and achievement made in the past year.

I am particularly pleased to highlight that Regional Soil partnerships have been established from the Caribbean to North Africa. This is a significant development, since it is at regional and country levels that most of the operational work is to take place. GSP needs to move more to field based actions.

The GSP is by design a "coalition of the willing", so its success clearly depends on commitment from partners. I wish to recognize the excellent team of experts who comprise the Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils (ITPS) and the many working groups.

This second session of the Assembly is filled with far more substantive items, including consideration and approval of Plans of Action under the GSP Pillars and the endorsement of a revised World Soil Charter. This will constitute an important stepping stone in the required definite move towards field orientation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the coming two years we have a unique opportunity to draw the world's attention to the status of the finite soils resources and natural resources at large.

The approval of the World Soil Day every 5th December, the declaration of 2015 as International Year of Soil, the upcoming UN Climate Events in Peru among others constitute a major opportunity to raise awareness on desertification, land degradation, and drought, in line with the objective of the UNCCD, and to seek high-level political commitments.

The soil community should combine this with on-going Post- 2015 negotiation to demonstrate and reinforce the synergies within sustainable soil management and proposed goals.

As I have stressed before, GSP needs to move into concrete and widespread field action. In effect, our real success will be felt to the extent GSP achievements are contributing to livelihood support, the eradication of hunger and responding to global challenges.

This ambition need to be matched by sufficient technical, financial and political actions.

I wish you a productive session in the coming days, and thank you for your unwavering commitment to the cause of sustainable soil management.

Thank You.