

FAO Conference: 39th Session

SIDE EVENT: “Appointment of the Special Ambassadors for the International Year of Soils and open discussion on healthy soils for food security”

Introduction

After several months of consultation FAO has selected two Special Ambassadors for the International Year of Soils. The two ambassadors will be officially presented by the FAO Director General of FAO to the members at the 39th Session of the FAO Conference.

Right after the nomination ceremony, there will be an interactive discussion with members, civil society, and private sector on the role of healthy soils for food security.

The structure and flow of the side event will be divided into two clearly divided sections.

Objective

The main objectives of the two sections of this side event are to:

- i) Section 1: make public the official nomination of the two special ambassadors for soils, in order to contribute to the awareness raising and advocacy efforts during 2015 on soils; and
- ii) Section 2: highlight those specific interventions and policy actions from different key stakeholders, which have contributed to improve soils management and hence to food security.

Background

The 68th UN General Assembly declared 2015 as the International Year of Soils (IYS) in order to raise awareness on the importance of soils for food security, nutrition and essential eco-system functions¹.

Soil is a finite resource, whose loss and degradation is not recoverable within a human lifespan. The most widely recognized function of soil is its support for food production. It is the foundation for agriculture and the medium in which nearly all food-producing plants grow. In fact, it is estimated that 95% of our food is directly or indirectly produced on our soils. Healthy soils supply the essential nutrients, water, oxygen and root support that our food-producing plants need to grow and flourish. There is more life in a tablespoon of healthy soils than human beings on earth. Therefore, the link between health soils and life in general and food security and nutrition² in particular is becoming more and more evident.

Despite being the support where life thrives, today 33 percent of soil is moderately to highly degraded, due to erosion, salinization, compaction, acidification and chemical pollution³. Sustainable management of the world’s soil resources has become necessary for reversing the present soil degradation trend, thus ensuring future food security.

¹ http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/68/232&Lang=E

² <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4405e.pdf>

³ Soil is a non-renewable resource: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4373e.pdf>

In order to reverse soil degradation, there is need for combined actions from all stakeholders as well as targeted policies from states.

The year 2015 constitutes a unique opportunity as member states are closing the decision on the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The fact that 2015 is also the International Year of Soils, offers the possibility of linking evidence and good policies to the final discussion that member states will have on indicators in September 2015.

Only by acknowledging the key roles by different stakeholders and through the implementation of targeted policies and interventions, will the present trend of soils loss be reverted and soil fertility improved.

Structure of the side event

Section 1: This section will last 20 minutes, and will be facilitated by Marcela Villarreal, Director OPC and Secretary of the International year of Soils. FAO's Director General Dr. Jose Graziano Da Silva, will nominate the two ambassadors: Professor Claire Chenu and Professor Tekalign Mamo, who will address the audience, with 5 minutes each.

Estimated time 20-25 minutes: (Facilitation: 5 min; FAO DG: 5 min; Ambassadors: 10 min)

Section 2: This section will last 40 minutes and will follow a talk show format facilitated by a senior delegate from the European Union. This open discussion with the panellists and the audience will consist in the facilitator keeping the centre of the debate by asking very specific questions to the panellists. Upon their responses, the facilitator will take back the use of the word and ask the next question to another panellist. This debate will be followed by a 10 minutes questions and answers from the floor to any of the panellists.

The open discussion will help in responding to the following questions:

What specific action has your organization taken in support of soil fertility and how it has contributed to food security?

What specific policy interventions have your Country undertaken to counterbalance soil degradation?

Estimated time 40-50 minutes: Facilitation: 5-8 min; Ministers: (3) 15 min; Stakeholders: 5 min; Videos: 4 min; Q&A: 8-10 min; Closure Event: 5 min

Participants & Target Audience

The eminent panellists will include several Ministers as well as the Special Ambassadors for the International Year of Soils. IFA, IFOAM and La Via Campesina will also participate through video messages. The target audience are policy makers and decision makers, practitioners, civil society organizations, private sector, United Nations agencies and academic institutions.

AGENDA

Venue: Sheikh Zayed Centre

Day: 10 June 2015 (17:00-18:30)

SECTION 1: Appointment of the Special Ambassadors for the International Year of Soils (30')

Welcoming remarks & Facilitation (5'):

- Marcela Villarreal, OPC Director and International Year of Soils Secretariat

Appointment of the Special Ambassadors for the International Year of Soils 2015 (15'):

- Dr. José Graziano da Silva, Director-General, FAO
- Prof. Claire Chenu, Vice-Chair of the Conseil Scientifique du Patrimoine Naturel et de la Biodiversité
- Prof. Tekalign Mamo, University of Haramaya

SECTION 2: Talk Show: Open discussion on healthy soils for food security (55')

Introduction of the debate & facilitation (5'):

- Marcela Villarreal, Secretariat International Year of Soils, Director, Office for Partnerships, Advocacy and Capacity Development, FAO

Talk Show & open discussion (40'):

- Moderator: H.E. Laurence Argimon Pistre, Ambassador, Delegation of the European Union to the Holy See, to the Order of Malta and to the UN Agencies in Rome

Eminent speakers:

- H.E. Tabare Aguerre, Minister of Agriculture of Uruguay
- H.E. Aroldo Cedraz, Minister of the Federal Court of Accounts, Brazil
- H.E. Ahmed Yakubu Alhassan, Deputy Minister for Food and Agriculture, Ghana
- Prof. Claire Chenu, Special Ambassador for the International Year of Soils
- Prof. Tekalign Mamo, Special Ambassador for the International Year of Soils

Video messages from:

- H.E. Petipong Pungbun Na Ayudhya, Minister for Agriculture and Cooperatives, Thailand
- International Fertilizer Industry Association (IFA)
- International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) (tbc)
- La Via Campesina (tbc)

Questions and answers (10')

Closing remarks (5'):

- Ms. Maria Helena Semedo, Deputy Director General, Coordinator for Natural Resources, FAO