Council

Hundred and Forty-eighth Session

Rome, 3-7 December 2012

Observance of World Soil Day

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| **Executive Summary**  Soil is a finite natural resource. On a human time-scale it is non-renewable. Soils, the foundation of agricultural development and ecological sustainability, provide the basis for food, feed, fuel and fibre production, clean water, nutrient cycles, organic carbon stocks, one quarter of global biodiversity, and also serve as a platform for construction, as well as being a source of construction materials. However, despite the essential role that soil plays in the life of humanity degradation of soil resources is increasing due to inappropriate practices, growing population pressures and inadequate governance of this essential natural resource. Maintaining healthy soils required for feeding the growing population of the world and meeting their needs for biomass (energy), fibre, fodder, and other products can only be ensured through joint efforts by the global community, such as the proposal to observe World Soil Day annually on 5 December. |
| **Suggested action by the Council**  The Council may wish to:   * 1. endorse the Observance of the World Soil Day (5 December) as a valid platform for raising awareness on the importance of soils for food security and ecosystem functions;   2. request the 38th Session of the FAO Conference (June 2013) to endorse the proposal to establish 5 December as World Soil Day, and to request the Director-General of FAO to formally request the Secretary-General of the United Nations to table the proposal at the General Assembly of the United Nations. |
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1. Given the importance of soils, in 2002 the International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS)[[1]](#footnote-1) made a resolution to propose 5 December as World Soil Day. The date was chosen to honour His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, King of Thailand, for his promotion of soil science and soil resources conservation. The purpose of the proposed World Day is to celebrate the importance of soil as a critical component of global ecosystems and as a vital contributor to human wellbeing through its contribution to food, water and energy security in mitigating biodiversity loss and climate change. At present, World Soil Day is celebrated mainly by the global community of some 60 000 soil scientists charged with responsibility of generating and communicating knowledge and understanding of the key role of soil in supporting life and agricultural production on earth.
2. Despite the commendable efforts by the IUSS and the soil scientists globally, soils are often perceived as a second priority during national and global decision making processes. Indeed, degradation of soils is a silent process that does not attract the attention of decision makers. Yet soils are clearly the key to addressing the current and future pressures of a growing population. Recognition, advocacy and support for promoting sustainable management of soils is the only alternative if the international community is going to guarantee healthy soils for a food secure world based on stable and sustainable ecosystems.
3. Within the framework of the "Global Soil Partnership", FAO advocates for international recognition of the importance of soils for achieving sustainable food security, as well as for its pivotal role in helping to enable the survival and growth of healthy ecosystems.
4. After the Rio+20 Conference, it is evident that there is still need to raise awareness and to promote and facilitate actions towards the sustainable management of soils in order to reach the agreed sustainable development goals of a zero-hunger and land-degradation neutral world.
5. FAO, through the Global Soil Partnership, under the leadership of Thailand, the Asian Regional Group and G77, and with support of their members as expressed during a presentation made at the 144th Session of the FAO Council (11-15 June 2012), will request the UN system to recognize 5 December as World Soil Day and institutionalize its observance accordingly. Activities such as the observance of World Soil Day by national governments, international and national organizations and civil society will assist in raising awareness and achieving recognition for soil as an essential, finite and non-renewable natural resource and as so mobilize the international community to actions towards its sustainable management.

1. <http://www.iuss.org> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)