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para la
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COUNCIL

Hundred and Forty-sixth Session

Rome, 22-26 April 2013

International Years Part A: International Year of Soils

Executive Summary

The Government of the Kingdom of Thailand has proposed within the framework of the Global Soil Partnership (GSP), the celebration of an International Year of Soils (IYS). “Healthy soils for a healthy life”, has been proposed as a theme for raising awareness of the importance of sustainable soil management as the basis for food systems, fuel and fibre production, essential ecosystem functions and better adaptation to climate change for present and future generations.

Soil is a finite natural resource and is non-renewable on a human time scale. Soils are the foundation for food, animal feed, fuel and natural fibre production, the supply of clean water, nutrient cycling and a range of ecosystem functions. The area of fertile soils covering the world’s surface is limited and increasingly subject to degradation, poor management and loss to urbanization. Increased awareness of the life-supporting functions of soil is called for if this trend is to be reversed and so enable the levels of food production necessary to meet the demands of population levels predicted for 2050. The budgetary implications of the proposal are set out in paragraph 4 of this document.

Suggested action by the Council

The Council may wish to:

- a) Review the proposal by Thailand to celebrate an International Year of Soils (IYS) as a platform for raising awareness of the importance of soils for food security and essential ecosystem functions and to mobilize support for its sustainable management;
- b) Take into consideration the FAO Policy on the Proclamation and Implementation of International Years, (see C 2013/LIM/15) and
- c) Make a recommendation to the 38th Session of Conference for decision.

Queries on the content of this document may be addressed to:

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I. Background

1. Recognizing the critical role of soils as a finite natural resource essential for food security and vital ecosystem functions, the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand has launched an initiative to celebrate an International Year of Soils (IYS), “Healthy soils for a healthy life”. The initiative was initially presented to the 144th Session of the FAO Council. Subsequently, the FAO Regional Group for Asia and the G77 Rome Chapter formalized a request to consider the proposal. Further to this, the Permanent Representative of Thailand to FAO submitted a draft Conference Resolution on IYS, for consideration by Council (see Annex).

II. Objectives

2. The IYS would aim to: (i) Raise awareness of civil society actors and decision makers of the fundamental role of soils for human existence, their role for food security, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and as a support for productive ecosystems; (ii) Act as catalyst and enabling environment for global soil initiatives in response to the outcome of Rio+20 and MDGs; (iii) Promote, at all levels, policies and actions for the sustainable management and protection of soil resources; (iv) Appeal for support and investment in soil activities across the regions aiming at healthy soils to increase food production and global food security; (v) Advocate for the enhancement of soil information at all levels to support more effective policies, strategies and actions for sustainable soil management.

III. Expected results

3. The global soil community, international organizations and national governments would contribute to achieving the following results:
- a) Recognition by national and international organizations, national governments, civil society, private sector and decision makers of the crucial role of soils;
 - b) Commitment towards a sustainable soil management strategy and action as part of the Sustainable Development Agenda and MDGs to revert the current soil degradation trend that is threatening a key natural resource;
 - c) Support for the establishment of a monitoring system of the status of global soil resources as a direct source of information to guide the development and implementation of policies, strategies and actions towards healthy soils.
 - d) Development of an updated World Soil Charter as an expression of commitment by different stakeholders on the management and protection of the world’s soil resources.

IV. Financial Implications

4. The declaration of IYS has budgetary implications for FAO through the GSP. Extra-budgetary funding will be pursued by the GSP Secretariat, estimated to range between USD 1.8 to 2.2 million, would be needed beginning in late 2014, should the proposal be endorsed by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

V. Strategy for implementation

5. Partnership will be the key concept for implementing the IYS as the range of partners is broad, and each will contribute within available means towards successful outcomes. The Global Soil Partnership and its partners needs to play a pivotal role in the facilitation and implementation of the objectives proposed for this IYS.

VI. Proposed activities

6. Proposed activities for the celebration of the IYS would include (i) Awareness raising about importance on soils; (ii) Capacity development on soils; (iii) Advocacy for sustainable soil management; and (iv) Supporting the implementation of sustainable soil management.

Draft Resolution submitted by the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Thailand

Resolution .. /2013
International Year of Soils

THE CONFERENCE,

Noting that soils constitute the foundation for all agricultural development, ecosystem functions, food security and are the key to sustaining life on Earth;

Recognizing that the sustainable intensification of agriculture to feed the growing population by 2050 will depend increasingly on healthy and fertile soils across the world;

Affirming that soils are clearly key to addressing the pressures of a growing population and that recognition, advocacy and support for promoting sustainable management of soils is the way ahead if the international community is to guarantee healthy soils for a food secure world based on stable and sustainable ecosystems.

Recognizing that soils constitute a fragile foundation and that soil degradation is a far-reaching long-term process which threatens global soil resources and therefore compromises actions in favour of climate change adaptation and efforts to reduce hunger, malnutrition and poverty;

Recalling the urgent need to raise awareness and to promote and facilitate actions towards the sustainable management of soils in order to contribute to the agreed sustainable development goals of a zero-hunger and land-degradation neutral world as stated at the Rio+20 Conference;

Trusting that such a celebration would establish a platform and will encourage actions to promote and implement activities in favour of the sustainable management of global soil resources

Affirming the urgent need of raising public awareness of the importance of soils for food security and ecosystem functions;

Requests the Director-General to transmit this Resolution to the Secretary-General of the United Nations with a view to having the General Assembly of the United Nations consider at its next session declaring the Year.... as the International Year of Soils.

(Adopted on ...)