

International Union of Soil Sciences



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IUSS - Statement for the Celebration of the UN World Soil Day in Rome and New York, Dec.5, 2014

Excellencies, Presidents, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen!

On behalf of the International Union of Soil Sciences, I have the privilege and honour to convey the best greetings of more than 60,000 soil scientists from around the world to you, on the occasion of the World Soil Day celebration by the U.N./FAO in Rome and New York. The World Soil Day (WSD) was initiated by the Council of IUSS in August 2002 during the 17th World Congress of Soil Science, which was opened by her Highness Princess of Thailand. The decision was taken by the council members, who defined the 5th of December, which is the birthday of his Majesty King Bumibhol Adulyadej of Thailand, as the “International Day of the Soil”. Therefore, for the last 10 years, the WSD has been commemorated by numerous national soil science societies all over the world, thus initiating the celebration of the Soil of the Year as a continuous annual event in order to enhance awareness of the beauties, the potential, and the vulnerability of the world soils. After an audience of 3 IUSS representatives with his Majesty King Bumibhol of Thailand in April 2012 in Bangkok, the Government of Thailand submitted officially a proposal for the International Day of the Soil to the FAO Council for support at the UN General Assembly in New York. In December 2013 the UN not only installed the WSD but also 2015 as the “Year of the Soil”. From 2015 onwards, the WSD will be celebrated by the IUSS in close cooperation with UN /FAO, Global Soil Partnership (GSP) and other worldwide organisations.

This very positive and supportive link between the IUSS as a scientific organisation and various other international organisations (e.g., FAO and UN) allow to promote soil awareness and to foster the knowledge about soils as a non-renewable and very sensitive and fragile ecosystem. Therefore, soils must be used carefully and according to their resilience and elasticity for the long-term maintenance of key properties and processes, thus meeting the demands of the growing world population. Through land misuse and soil mismanagement, soils have been increasingly degraded and some were irreversibly lost. Therefore, we have to make clear, that just public concern is not sufficient to protect soils and to use them sustainably. We need to take action! The strategy is to reach sustainable intensification for achieving food security, sufficient drinking water supply, and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. This means the mitigation of global change processes for maintaining healthy soils.

Therefore, it is essential for scientists and the interested community to know more about soils and their functions. Additionally it is important to convince politicians, decision makers, landowners, and the world community about the importance of soils for the provision of goods and services for humankind.

It has been more than 500 years ago the famous artist and scientist Leonardo Da Vinci pointed out that “we know more about celestial bodies than about soils underfoot”. As is indicated by the celebrations of the WSD today soils should receive the importance which they rightfully deserve. They should be placed at the forefront of the scientific agenda, on the roster of policy makers, and in the awareness of the general public. Soils, as we know, are the most complex biomaterials on the planet and are a self-regulating biological factory. Thus, it is absolutely essential that soil degradation, as the most insidious and underestimated challenge of the 21st century, must be defeated. At present, the vulnerability of soils because of global change and under anthropogenic impacts is unprecedented. Severe degradation, including widespread contamination, accelerated erosion, severe depletion of carbon and nutrients, rapid urbanization, and frequent hazards are threatening sustainable food production, adequate water supply, global ecosystem services, and the quality of human life. Soil carbon sequestration, soil restoration, the conservation of biodiversity and other important soil functions are important for the sustainable land and soil use.

The IUSS will cooperate with UN and other organisations to improve the scientific knowledge and to promote the global acceptance of soils as one of the most important natural resources. The IUSS will also strengthen the awareness concerning the vulnerability of soils to abiotic and biotic stresses and the limitation of diverse land use approaches. As the world’s leading soil sciences union and member of ICSU, IUSS in cooperation with FAO, UN and other organisations, IUSS has the capacity and the responsibility to jointly undertake initiatives to improve the visibility of soil related issues to the public at large. It should also convince landowners, farmers, foresters and the policy makers to observe soil properties and functions as well as their threats and limits. On this auspicious occasion of the WSD, IUSS as the founding organisation of the WSD in 2002, congratulates the FAO and the UN for celebrating the World Soil Day together with the launch of the International Year of Soils 2015.

Finally, I express my sincere wishes for a strong cooperation between IUSS and UN/FAO. Together we can enlarge the scientific knowledge, strengthen the understanding of the soil as a finite and non-renewable resource, promote the sustainable use of soils, and enhance awareness about the importance of soils for the production of food, adaptation and mitigation of climate change, and the provision of water. Soil is the basis of all terrestrial and aquatic life. It must be used, restored and improved for human wellbeing and nature conservation.

Happy World Soil Day.

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