

5 December 2014

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,
President of the 69th Session of the General Assembly,
on World Soil Day and Launch of the International Year of Soils**

Delivered by H.E. Mr. Nicholas Emiliou, Permanent Representative of Cyprus, on behalf of the President

**Excellencies,
Mr. Secretary-General
President of ECOSOC
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is my pleasure to join you today to celebrate this inaugural World Soil Day and launch the International Year of Soils. At the outset, I would like to thank the Permanent Missions of Qatar and Thailand and the Food and Agriculture Organization for organizing this event.

Healthy lands and soils are of paramount importance to mankind. As a cornerstone of sustainable ecosystems, they play an essential role in the production of food and the availability of water and energy. Yet, despite their critical role in sustaining life on our planet, they are one of the most undervalued and overlooked natural resource.

Today, land degradation affects one quarter of global land surface. It is estimated that roughly 75 billion tons of fertile topsoil are lost each year, with estimated annual losses amounting to US\$490 billion.

Declining land productivity often hits the poorest and most vulnerable communities the hardest due to lower food production and decreased incomes. Furthermore, in many parts of the world, land degradation has also spurred conflict over resources and caused environmental deterioration and the loss of biodiversity.

We can no longer afford to ignore the widespread problems that have emerged as a result of unsustainable soil management practices.

By 2030, the world's demand for food is projected to increase by at least 50 percent. Energy and water demand is projected to increase by at least 45 and 35 percent respectively. Meanwhile, in most regions of the world, the possibility of expanding arable land is limited. If we are to ensure food security for future generations, we must take urgent and concerted actions to address soil degradation.

Esteemed Colleagues,

From strengthening food security to protecting threatened ecosystems, from mitigating climate change to preventing desertification, sustainable soil management practices can benefit mankind and the environment in many ways.

Effective soil management can improve the livelihoods of rural populations and reduce unemployment by creating job opportunities in agriculture and processing industries.

This will require a holistic approach to address the physical and biological aspects of soil management, while considering the economic needs and social and cultural values of affected populations. By including all relevant stakeholders, including policy makers, technical experts and land users, we can ensure that effective policies are adopted and implemented.

In this process, governments bear the primary responsibility of improving policy and institutional frameworks, while creating socio-economic conditions favourable to sustainable soil management. International support is also essential, especially for developing countries.

A global partnership involving governments, the private sector, civil society and all other stakeholders can contribute to promoting research, improving institutional capacity, acquiring sustainable agriculture technology and financing infrastructure development.

Excellencies,

Effective management of land and soils is an essential component of sustainable development. The contribution of healthy soils is reflected in several of the sustainable development goals proposed by the Open Working Group..

In resolution 68/232 proclaiming World Soil Day and the International Year of Soils, the General Assembly underscored that soils are key to sustaining life on Earth. As we commemorate this first World Soil Day and launch the International year, I call on Member States, the United Nations system, civil society and all concerned citizens to help raise awareness and promote the sustainability of our limited soil resources.

Looking ahead, we must prioritize the sustainable management of soils, for healthy lands are the fertile ground on which we will build the future we want.

Thank you for your attention.