

COMMON STATEMENT

September 2011

Protecting Soils for our Common Future

A call for action

Participants of an international meeting at the German Federal Environment Agency, Berlin in September 2011:

Noting that soils are the basis for life on earth, and that food, feed, fibre and bioenergy production as well as the entire terrestrial biodiversity directly depend on them,

Further noting that soils are inter alia the medium of plant growth, sources of terrestrial net primary production, reservoirs of gene pools, moderators of climate, sinks of atmospheric carbon, reservoirs of plant nutrients and cycling, and providers of clean water,

Taking into account that soils have been taken for granted for too long, and that over the last few decades they have been further degraded and desertified by misuse and mismanagement, thereby jeopardizing this essential finite natural resource and its ecosystem services,

Recognizing that inter alia Millennium Development Goal number one, to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, Millennium Development Goal number seven to ensure environmental sustainability, the global environmental targets to combat climate change and to stem the loss of biodiversity will not be reached, unless there is a fundamental change to the unsustainable use and management of soils around the globe,

Acknowledging that although soil degradation in many regions of the world is obvious, there is still a significant lack of scientific knowledge, about its extent, regional distribution and trends,

In the light of the resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 29 September 2011 on developing a common EU position ahead of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and noting in particular clause 52, that the European Parliament...: “Regrets the slow progress of negotiations and commitments in the context of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD); considers that soil is a scarce resource and that land degradation and land use change require a global response; calls for concrete action, efficient measures and monitoring, especially as regards the production of biofuels;”,

Recognizing the fundamental role of fertile soil for sustainable development and a green economy,

Urges the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20 Conference) in 2012:

1. To recognize that a coordinated global science and policy and legal approach is therefore required to ensure that soils are used, managed and restored according to principles of ecosystem resilience;

2. To initiate action to promote scientific study, legal protection and policy responses on the sustainable use of soils on a global basis and, to this end, request the Executive Director of UNEP and the Director General of FAO, in conjunction with the Executive Secretary of the UNCCD:
 - a. To prepare, at the earliest date possible, a comprehensive global report on the state of world soils, on the basis of the most current scientific information, in order to overcome existing gaps in scientific knowledge and to provide policy makers with better information and scientific advice for soil policies;
 - b. To organize an ongoing authoritative and globally agreed scientific assessment on the state of the world's soils, with a complementary commitment to set and monitor quantitative targets to prevent degradation and restore degraded soils, with a view to providing comprehensive ongoing information and targets to policy makers, land managers and other stakeholders on soil quality, to improve food security and enhance other ecosystem services, with the long-term aim of eradicating poverty, eliminating malnutrition and promoting ecological, economic and social/cultural sustainability as the basis of a green economy.

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