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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: Initiative to declare 20th of May as the World Bee Day
- Information from the Slovenian delegation

With a view to the meeting of the FAO Coordination Working Party on 21 April 2016, delegations will find in Annex a document submitted by the Slovenian delegation on the Slovenian Government's initiative to have 20th of May declared by the United Nations as the World Bee Day.

Initiative to declare 20th of May as the World Bee Day

Bees and other pollinators¹ are vital for our food security and nutrition, sustainable agriculture, the environment and biodiversity conservation, as well as many other sectors.

Over the last 50 years, global agriculture has become increasingly pollinator dependant. Agricultural production that is independent from animal pollination has doubled, while agricultural production requiring animal pollination has increased four-fold. One third of the food produced in the world depends on pollination. Crop pollination is estimated to be worth €153 billion globally and €22 billion in Europe every year.² Of the main crops grown for human consumption in Europe, 84% require pollination to enhance product quality and yields, e.g. many types of fruit, vegetables and nuts.

In addition to food, bees and other pollinators contribute to growing of crops that provide biofuels, fibres, medicines, forage, and construction materials. Pollination is the agricultural input that contributes the greatest to yields worldwide, beyond other management practices. Several crops represent an important source of income for farmers, in particular small-holder farmers and family farms, especially in developing countries (e.g. cocoa and coffee). Due to sustainable development of the agricultural system, for which bees and other pollinators play a key role, millions of jobs worldwide are created.

¹ There are more than 20,000 species of wild bees alone, plus many species of butterflies, flies, moths, wasps, beetles, birds, bats and other animals that contribute to pollination.

² Gallai et al. 2008. [Economic valuation of the vulnerability of world agriculture confronted with pollinator decline](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921800908002942). <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921800908002942>.

Another important fact is that through pollination that ensures successful agricultural production, bees and other pollinators contribute significantly to the world food security and nutrition for the growing global population, and most importantly to poverty and hunger eradication. Pollination has positive effects on the whole ecosystem and its services. It contributes positively to the status of biodiversity by safeguarding ecosystems, species and genetic diversity, thus supporting the EU targets of the Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 and mitigating the impacts of the invasive alien species in the EU. Bees and other pollinators are also an important bio indicator of the state of the environment. Changes in the environment can have significant consequences for their health and development, and thus for our own well-being.

There are many other dimensions of sustainable development that benefit from bees and other pollinators and their services; they are economically, socially and culturally important. Pollinators, especially bees, have also played a role throughout human history as inspirations for art, music, religion and technology.

Despite their importance bees and other pollinators are in decline in some of the major agricultural regions.³ Moreover, a growing number of pollinator species worldwide are being driven toward extinction by diverse pressures, many of them human-made.⁴ Changes in land use and landscape structure, intensive agricultural practices and use of pesticides have led to large-scale losses, fragmentation and degradation of their habitats. Pests and diseases resulting from the reduced resistance of bee colonies and from globalization, which supports the transmission of pests over long distances, pose a special threat. Climate change has an effect, as well. Higher temperatures, droughts, floods, other extreme climate events and changes of flowering time hinder pollination.

³ According to the IUCN report, their habitat is shrinking and the conditions for their survival and development are steadily worsening. IUCN report. European Red List of Bees.
http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/erl_of_bees_low_res_for_web.pdf.

⁴ IPBES. Thematic Assessment of Pollinators, Pollination and Food Production.
<http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/384726/icode/>.

Against this background, it is of paramount significance that we put efforts into strengthening our common care for the bees and the other pollinators throughout the EU and beyond and raise public awareness of their important role for agriculture, the environment and human livelihoods. To strengthen these efforts the Republic of Slovenia on the initiative of the Slovenian Beekeepers' Association will propose to establish the Observance by the United Nations system of the World Bee Day to be celebrated on May 20.

May in the Northern hemisphere is the month when the bees and other pollinators are very active. In this period they are most numerous and the need for pollination is at its maximum. In the southern hemisphere on the other hand, it is autumn time, the time for harvesting products, and thus the days and weeks of honey. May 20th is the day when Anton Janša (1734-1773), a pioneer of modern beekeeping and one of the greatest experts on bees of the time, was born.

Slovenia presented the World Bee Day Initiative to the Agriculture and Fisheries Council in May 11 2015 (documents 8378/15⁵ and 9063/15⁶), and a vast majority of Member States welcomed the initiative.

This year the formal procedure has been undertaken. In order to reach the designation of May 20 as World Bee Day from the United Nations, the support of the FAO Membership is recommended. According to the FAO guidance on the necessary steps in this regard, the proposal needs to be endorsed by the Committee on Agriculture at its next meeting in September and by the FAO Council in December 2016 with the view to have a resolution endorsed by the FAO Conference in July 2017.

⁵ Initiative to declare 20th of May as the World Bee Day – Information from the Slovenian delegation presented under “Any other business” at the Council of the European Union (Agriculture and Fisheries) at its session on 11 May 2015.

⁶ Minutes of the 3386th meeting of the Council of the European Union (Agriculture and Fisheries) held in Brussels on 11 May 2015.

After the endorsement by the FAO Conference the FAO will be requested to transmit the Resolution for the World Bee Day to the Secretary-General of the United Nations with a view to having the General Assembly of the United Nations consider declaring May 20 as the World Bee Day at its next session in autumn 2017. According to the planned timeline, the first Observance of the World Bee Day will be on 20 May 2018.
