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c/o World Food Programme

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Kick-off meeting of the Editorial Board of the Soil Atlas of Asia
Opening Remarks of Mr. Jose Luis Fernandez
FAO Representative in the Philippines

13 March 2018

Sequoia Hotel, Quezon City

Assistant Secretary Mr. Andrew Villacorta, Asec for Agribusiness, Ms. Angel C. Enriquez, OIC-Director, Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Soils and Water Management (DA-BSWM).

Ms. Angel C. Enriquez, OIC – Director, Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Soil and Water Management (DA-BSWM)

Mr. Arwyn Jones, European Commission Joint Research Center, distinguished delegates and participants from the Philippines represented by DA-BSWM, Japan, Mongolia, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Hungary, Italy, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Russia.

Good morning.

It is a great honour for us to welcome you to the kick –off meeting of the Editorial Board of the Soil Atlas of Asia. Please allow me to start by thanking the Joint Research Center of the European Commission and the Department of Agriculture- Bureau of Soils and Water Management, for co-organizing and sponsoring this event. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations through its Global Soil Partnership (GSP), has long been aiming to organize an international event in the Philippines. I also wish to express our gratitude to each one of you, who recognize the importance of harnessing and protecting soil resources and the need for collaborative efforts to do so.

The development of this Atlas contributes to the execution of the Asian Soil Partnership Implementation plan that was endorsed by member countries in December 2016. In addition, the Atlas will form part of a collection of Atlases initiated and produce by the Joint Research Center, who will sponsor its development. It is through the leadership and coordination of all of you, distinguished members of the Editorial Board, that the Soil Atlas of Asia will come to life.

Soil is the foundation of agriculture- it is where food begins...but it is also essential for the provision of fuel, clean water, fiber, habitat, nutrients, medicines, and may more. Maintaining the soil's important functions and services to support food production and environmental resilience to a changing climate necessitates sustainable soil management practices.

This principle is supported by the Sustainable Development Goals, and climate change discussions under the Paris agreement, and Conference of Parties (COP) 23, wherein *Soils* was finally given recognition for its role to address climate change and to contribute to sustainable soil management was highlighted also at COP13 of United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), where member countries were invited to implement the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management in order to achieve the SDGs, particularly when addressing land degradation neutrality.

In order for soils to be in the development agenda, there is a need to raise awareness of the general public, land managers/owners, policy makers, non-government organizations, private sector, academic and research institutions, on the importance of soils. The Soil Atlas of Asia will not respond to this need, but will also support policies and instruments for investment, agriculture, environmental issues, climate change, land use planning, sustainable development and emergency response, among others. It will provide information, education and communication materials to schools and universities to support learning and it will constitute a baseline for further soil assessments in the region.

Additionally, the production of the Atlas will promote the development of national soil maps and it will contribute to the soil data harmonization process initiated within the GSP Pillars 4 and 5, which are part of the Global Soil Information System (GLOSIS).

We hope that the preparation of this Atlas will foster technical and scientific cooperation among countries and regions. We also acknowledge that this exercise does not only involve countries in the Asian Soil Partnership but also countries belonging to the Eurasian Soil Partnership and the near East and North African Soil Partnership. In closing, allow me to once again appreciate everyone's' support in this endeavor.

I wish you all a productive meeting ahead.

Thank you.