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COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Twenty-seventh Session

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Proposal for an International Day of Plant Health

Executive Summary

A key factor in any strategy to eliminate hunger and rural poverty must include the protection of plant health from pests and diseases. When introduced into new ecosystems, plant pests and diseases often have devastating effects on food security and the environment. Plant protection services worldwide are facing increasing pest risks in the face of a changing climate and decreasing resources. Plant pests and diseases are responsible for losses of up to 40 percent of global food crops and trade losses exceeding USD 220 billion in agricultural products annually. In addition, other factors including climate change, biodiversity loss, soil and seed health and water quality can affect the health and productivity of crops grown for human consumption.

Promoting and preserving plant health globally is essential to food security and, ultimately, to achieving the Right to Food, amongst other objectives. Food and agriculture are key in achieving goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Policies and actions to promote plant health in this context are fundamental in achieving the SDGs, in particular those aimed at eliminating hunger and malnutrition and reducing poverty and threats to the environment.

The Government of Zambia, with the support of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)'s Commission on Phytosanitary Measures and the International Year of Plant Health (IYPH) International Steering Committee (ISC), has proposed for the observance of an International Day of Plant Health (IDPH) to provide continuity to the efforts made throughout the IYPH 2020 and continue to pursue the IYPH main objective which is to raise awareness of the importance and impacts of plant health in addressing issues of global significance, including hunger, poverty, threats to the environment and economic development.

Suggested action by the Committee

The Committee is invited to:

- Review the proposal by the Government of Zambia to establish the observance by the UN system of 12th May as the International Day of Plant Health (IDPH), and provide guidance as deemed appropriate.
- Endorse the draft Conference Resolution, as contained in Appendix A, and submit the proposal for approval by the 165th Session of the FAO Council (December 2020) and adoption by the 42nd Session of the FAO Conference (July 2021).

Queries on the substantive content of the document may be addressed to:

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I. Background

1. Since the beginning of the millennium, the value of world trade of agricultural products has tripled,¹ and further growth is anticipated. International trade of agricultural commodities as well as the effects of climate change have significantly increased the risk of pest introductions to new territories”. New pathways and disturbed ecological conditions set the perfect conditions for future major pest and disease epidemics in plants.
2. A key factor in any strategy to eliminate hunger and rural poverty must include the protection of plant health from pests and diseases. Productivity of crops grown for human consumption is increasingly at risk due to the increased incidence of pests and diseases. Those that have been introduced into new ecosystems can have devastating effects on food security and the environment. In fact, invasive alien species, including plant pests, are one of the five drivers of biodiversity loss.²
3. Plant health is increasingly under threat. Climate change and human activities have altered ecosystems, reducing biodiversity and creating new niches where pests and diseases can thrive. At the same time, international travel and trade are quickly increasing the magnitude of spread of plant pests and diseases around the world, causing great damage to native plants and the environment. As with human health, protecting plants from the introduction and spread of pests and diseases is far more cost-effective than dealing with full-blown emergencies.
4. Plant pests and diseases are often impossible to eradicate once they have established themselves and managing them is time consuming and expensive. Prevention is critical to avoid the devastating impact of pests and diseases on agriculture, livelihoods and food security. Applying coherent and consistent preventive measures would have a positive impact on adequate food supply and access.
5. While global pest risks increase, many national efforts to combat these risks are decreasing as a result of reduced committed resources for plant health, often significantly. National plant health research, taxonomical and diagnostic services are diminishing. Plant protection services worldwide are facing more and more pest risks with decreasing resources. Plant pests and diseases are responsible for the loss of up to 40 percent of global food crops and trade losses exceeding USD 220 billion in agricultural products annually. They leave millions without food to eat, and can negatively impact the livelihood, source of income of rural poor communities and national economies.
6. To raise awareness of the importance and impacts of plant health in addressing issues of global importance, including hunger, poverty, threats to the environment and economic development, the government of Finland championed the establishment of the International Year of Plant Health (IYPH) 2020, which was proclaimed unanimously by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2018.
7. The process for the IYPH proclamation was initiated at the level of the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM), IPPC’s governing body, which first endorsed the proposal to establish the IYPH at its 10th session in 2015. In April 2017, the 12th session of the CPM adopted the expected IYPH outputs and outcomes, inclusive of the proclamation of 6 December as the International Day of Plant Health.³
8. In December 2019, the CPM Bureau endorsed the initiation of the process to proclaim the International Day of Plant Health as one of the key IYPH legacies.
9. In January 2020, the IYPH International Steering Committee also endorsed the establishment of the International Day of Plant Health as one of the key IYPH legacies.

¹ FAO SOCO 2018: <http://www.fao.org/3/I9542EN/i9542en.pdf>

² IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>

³ https://www.ippc.int/static/media/files/publication/en/2017/05/CPM-12_Report-2017-05-30_withISPMs.pdf

A. The International Plant Protection Organization (IPPC)

10. The International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)⁴ is an international convention, governing plant health and established in 1951. It aims to protect global plant resources from plant pests and diseases by securing coordinated, effective action to prevent their introduction and spread. The IPPC, together with the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), is one of the international standard setting bodies (“Three Sisters”) recognized by the World Trade Organization’s Agreement on the application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement). The IPPC community operates as an Article XIV body of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). With 184 Contracting Parties, it has the largest membership of all such bodies within FAO, underlining the importance placed on the Convention by FAO Members.

11. In April 2018, the 13th Session of the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM-13)⁵ unanimously agreed that the work of the IPPC is critical to FAO’s work and highlighted that adequate food security is not possible without plant health and without plants there will be no life on earth.

12. Consequently, the 159th Session of the Council in June 2018 called on FAO to “adjust activities, where necessary, so that results could make greater contribution to the achievement of SDGs”. The Council also “emphasized the importance of international standard setting work such as the IPPC and stressed the need for sustainable funding for FAO’s work and activities relating to scientific advice for food safety”.⁶

13. Concerned by funding challenges for the national and regional plant protection organizations and the IPPC Secretariat despite the increasing phytosanitary challenges, the IPPC community was at the forefront of the IYPH proclamation, and showed its commitment to sustain the proclamation of an International Day of Plant Health along with relevant partners.

14. Plants account for over 80 percent of the human diet. As such, they are essential for food security and nutrition, or the ongoing access to sufficient, affordable, safe and nutritious food for us all to live active and healthy lives. Plant pests and diseases pose a threat to food security because they can damage crops, thus reducing the availability and access to food, increasing the cost of food. Plant pests and diseases may also negatively affect the palatability of foods resulting in changes to the traditional food preferences of populations.

15. Today, due to increasing global trade and a changing climate, plant pests and diseases pose a greater threat to food security than ever before, as global trade results in more pests moving from their native environments, and changing climates create new favourable conditions for plant pests and diseases. Plant pests and diseases are responsible for losses of up to 40 percent of global food production annually.

16. The human right to adequate food is recognized in several instruments in international law. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights deals more comprehensively than any other instrument with this right.⁷ Promoting and preserving plant health globally is essential to food security and, ultimately, to achieving the Right to Food, among other objectives.

17. Addressing plant health through targeting, tailoring and multilateral policymaking, contributes to the realization of the human right to adequate food by achieving and preserving food security and

⁴ IPPC text: <https://www.ippc.int/en/core-activities/governance/convention-text/>

⁵ CPM-13 (20) report: https://www.ippc.int/static/media/files/publication/en/2018/07/CPM_13_Report-2018-06-28_withISPMs.pdf

⁶ 159th session of FAO Council report:

http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/bodies/CL_159/CL159_Report/MX075_CL_159_REP_en.pdf

⁷

http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/righttofood/documents/RTF_publications/EN/General_Comment_12_EN.pdf

nutrition. The proclamation of an International Day of Plant Health would sustain efforts of the global community to ensure food security and sustain the right to adequate food.

B. Plant health and environmental protection

18. Plant Health contributes to environmental protection and biodiversity in many ways. Healthy plants are crucial for a healthy environment, and vice versa.

19. Invasive alien species, which are plant pests, are one of the five key drivers of biodiversity loss.⁸ Much needs to be done within the framework of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework to monitor, control and eradicate key invasive alien species while managing pathways to prevent their introduction and spread.

20. The implementation of globally recognized standards and policies including ISPMs and CPM Recommendations adopted under the IPPC framework contributes to minimizing the environmental risks posed by plant pests and diseases and their management.

21. Promoting globally recognized standards, policies and sustainable agricultural practices is indeed one of the key messages proposed for the International Day of Plant Health.

C. Plant health and trade facilitation

22. In today's globalized world, trade is a driver for economic development. Many countries depend on trading large quantities of plants and plant products, such as grain, fruit and vegetables or timber to sustain their economies. Yet trade could introduce and spread plant pests and diseases and threaten natural plant resources, managed crops, biodiversity and forest production. Therefore, it is important to facilitate safe trade by preventing the spread of plant pests and diseases and by avoiding unjustifiable barriers.

23. Core to the facilitation of safe trade is the implementation of IPPC and its International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs) that provide globally harmonized guidance for countries to manage pest risks, thus effectively ensuring safe and efficient trade of plants and agricultural products, and supporting developing and developed countries in accessing new markets. In order to reduce the risk of spreading pests and diseases, plants are often required to be accompanied by printed phytosanitary certificates, issued by the national plant protection organizations (NPPOs) of the exporting country, to attest that the commodity meets the requirements of the importing country.

24. However, trade is evolving and the IPPC is evolving with it. In 2014, the CPM adopted Appendix 1 to ISPM 12 (Electronic phytosanitary certificates, information on standard XML schemes and exchange mechanisms), a crucial step towards the global harmonization of electronic certification schemes. The IPPC ePhyto solution serves the same purpose as the old-fashioned paper equivalent. Moving towards electronic-based, paper-free technology for the exchange of certificate information will facilitate trade even more, especially benefiting developing countries. The further development and promotion of safe trade facilitation including the IPPC ePhyto solution is expected to be one of the highlights of the proposed International Day of Plant Health.

D. Plant health and climate change

25. Crop production, forests and other eco-systems are highly influenced by climate, because solar radiation, temperature and rainfall are the main non-human mediated factors affecting plant health. The life cycle of plant pests and diseases and in particular their epidemiological characteristics and their spread are determined by these non-human mediated climate factors. It can be predicted that

⁸ IPBES Global Assessment: <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>

warming trends and extreme changes will affect the incidence and distribution of plant pests and diseases. Other than human-mediated action driving climate change, there is also an interaction between trade, transportation networks and climate-driven population dynamics.

26. The mitigation of climate-change impacts on plant health will present a major challenge to NPPO and international organizations in the plant health field. Changes in food production patterns and trade will become apparent over the next two decades. The resulting changes in plant health, such as climate change-induced alterations in pest epidemiology and frequent expansion of pest distributions, will provide challenges, especially in areas such as surveillance, monitoring and other phytosanitary measures as well as pest risk analysis. The risk of pests and diseases adapting to a changing climate may cause new pest risks to major staple crops. Therefore, it is important to forecast, prevent and mitigate the effects of climate change on plant health.

27. Ensuring that the impacts of climate change on plant health are evaluated and explained to the public and policymakers, and international trade policy issues are reviewed in light of climate change are among the key motivating factors behind establishing an International Day of Plant Health.

II. Rationale for the establishment of an International Day of Plant Health (IDPH)

28. In view of the previous items and considering the contribution of plant health towards the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and particularly SDGs 1, 2, 8, 12, 13, 15 and 17, the IPPC community decided to continue nurturing the key objective of the IYPH, to raise awareness of the importance and impacts of plant health in addressing issues of global importance, including hunger, poverty, threats to the environment and economic development by pursuing the establishment of an IDPH as resolved by CPM-12 (2017) and recently endorsed by the CPM Bureau and IYPH ISC.

III. Implementation mechanism

29. The IDPH will be implemented by FAO Members with the support of the IPPC Secretariat and in collaboration with relevant FAO technical divisions, specialised offices and centres and in partnership with regional and national plant protection organizations. The CPM and its partners will play a pivotal role in the facilitation and implementation of the objectives proposed for this IDPH. Each year, science, technology, academia, industry, farmers and other international organizations would all have an important role to play to implement the IDPH, with different themes.

30. Resources to ensure the celebration of the International Day of Plant Health would be sought through extra-budgetary contributions received through the IPPC Multi-Donor Trust Fund, and as in-kind contributions by relevant partners.

Annex A

Draft Conference Resolution

Noting the CPM-12 (2017) endorsement of the proclamation of an International Day of Plant Health as one of the key outputs of the International Year of Plant Health, as also endorsed by the IYPH International Steering Committee;

Noting that healthy plants are the foundation for all life on Earth, ecosystem functions and food security and nutrition;

Recognizing that plant health is the key to the sustainable intensification of agriculture to feed a growing global population;

Acknowledging that plants account for 80 percent of our diets;

Affirming that plant health is critical to addressing the pressures of a growing population and that recognition, advocacy and support for the promotion of plant health is of paramount importance if the international community is to guarantee plant resources for a food secure world based on stable and sustainable ecosystems;

Recognizing that sustaining plant health contributes to protecting the environment, forests and biodiversity from plant pests and diseases, and supports efforts to reduce hunger, malnutrition and poverty;

Recalling the urgent need to raise awareness and to promote and facilitate actions towards the management of plant health in order to achieve United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030;

Trusting that such initiative would establish a platform and encourage actions to promote and implement activities in favour of preserving and sustaining global plant resources as well as raise awareness of the importance of plant health in addressing issues of global concern, including hunger, poverty and threats to the environment;

Affirming the urgent and continuing need of raising public awareness of the importance of healthy plants for food security, right to food and ecosystem functions;

Recognizing the critical importance of healthy plants on agricultural development, biodiversity, food security and nutrition, the Committee called for strong international collaboration, including through South-South Cooperation, harmonization and standard setting;

Stressing that additional costs of activities arising from the implementation of the International Day of Plant Health be met through voluntary contributions, including from the private sector;

Requests the Director-General to transmit this Resolution to the Secretary-General of the United Nations with a view to having the General Assembly of the United Nations consider declaring 12 May as the International Day of Plant Health.