

Combating soil degradation and artificialisation

AWARE that soils are reservoirs of biodiversity, ensuring numerous ecosystem services such as food production, climate regulation, water quality and human well-being in general, and that they can be maximised when soils are in good health;

AWARE that faced with the growing demands on soils by human activities, this limited and non-renewable resource is subject to pressures that have an impact on its quality and restrict its availability;

RECALLING that soil degradation is one of the major pressures on biodiversity: the physical destruction of soils, functional modifications, or artificialisation, or soils covering most of the areas being used for human activities (towns, homes, economic infrastructures, transport networks, some agricultural land, forest land and brownfields);

CONSIDERING that the degradation and artificialisation of soils leads to an increase in the effects linked to climate change such as the increased vulnerability to floods, the rise in greenhouse gas emissions due to the impacts on ways of life (increase in the time spent in means of transportation, the use of cars, the building of car parks, etc.), heat islands in towns and cities, etc.;

NOTING that all countries, developed or emergent, are directly dependent on the health of soils, but that soil health and the phenomenon of artificialisation do not always correlate with a country's real needs nor its health;

FURTHER NOTING that states, as well all private and public economic players and all sectors (property, tourism, industry, agriculture) do not seem to integrate this problem adequately into their development strategies and projects;

NOTING however with interest the work by certain states, which have carried out land use planning policies for their territory, objectives for limiting the consumption of natural, agricultural and forestry areas (green belts around towns, a zero net artificialisation goal) or economic levers (market for the rights to create an artificial environment, environmental tax incentives);

SATISFIED that numerous construction techniques mitigate the harmful effects of the degradation of soils (green roofs, pools, etc.) and allow for the restoration and improvement of ecosystem services; and

CONSIDERING that, despite the national initiatives and possible ways to improve soil health or to alleviate the soil artificialisation phenomenon, no global response has been formulated;

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2020, at its session in Marseille, France:

1. ASKS the States, sub-national and local governments at different levels to:

a. establish land use plans to curb the artificialisation of soils and improve their health, setting specific goals for the sustainable maintenance of non-artificialised soils;

b. develop policies for the renaturation and the de-artificialisation of soils, supporting the techniques for the reduction of the effects of soil sealing;

c. give priority to constructions on soils that have already been degraded or artificialised and apply circular economy principles (multifunctionality, shared usage, reversibility, etc.); and

d. propose economic incentive levers to:

i. preserve natural and agricultural areas of high ecological value, notably favouring virtuous land strategies and involving private owners;

ii. encourage the revaluation and optimisation of built-up land; and

iii. draw up strategies for the payment of ecosystem services and voluntary conservation aid programmes;

2. CALLS ON private and public economic players to include the fight against soil degradation or artificialisation in their development strategies, and to report on their initiatives, notably through their extra-financial reports;

3. ASKS non-governmental organisations and IUCN Members to collaborate with all the stakeholders in order to support these approaches through expertise, education and specific actions;
4. ASKS the competent agencies to reinforce controls and sanctions if necessary; and
5. ASKS IUCN to work with national and international soil organisations, in order to make progress in the fight against soil degradation and artificialisation.