The 3rd Observance of World Bee Day, 20 May 2020

Address by Dr Aleksandra Pivec,

Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Food of the Republic of Slovenia

Your Excellency Director General,

Distinguished representatives of FAO and partner institutions,

Dear beekeepers and other supporters of bees and other pollinators worldwide,

*Spoštovani slovenski čebelarke in čebelarji ter vsi ostali podporniki in prijatelji čebel in ostalih opraševalcev v Sloveniji,*

Ladies and Gentlemen!

I am glad that in spite of the current situation we managed to gather, albeit virtually, at this third international celebration of World Bee Day. Special thanks are due to the FAO, its partners and all others that have put their efforts into making this event possible.

This year the COVID-19 pandemic crossed our plans, but it also made us aware of how important safe, stable and sustainable food chains and systems are for people and the planet, and for which bees and other pollinators are vital.

“Bee Engaged", the theme of this year's celebration, is important, as it encourages and urges us to turn our words into actions, including countries, international and other organisations, research and educational institutions, civil society, the private sector, farmers and beekeepers, as well as individuals. Every one of us can make a great contribution just by slightly changing our everyday habits!

Bees and other pollinators are invaluable for humanity. Among other things, they are vital for successful and sustainable agricultural production. More than 70 % of major crops grown for human food around the world and more than 80 % in Europe depend on pollination.

Bees and other pollinators also have a positive impact on the entire ecosystem, on maintaining ecological balance and preserving biodiversity. They are the indicators of environmental health and we must keep in mind that human pressure on the environment is negatively reflected in the life and vitality of bees and can even threaten their existence!

In Slovenia, where beekeeping is part of the historical and cultural heritage and the Carniolan honey bee is one of the national symbols, people are very aware of the importance of bees and beekeeping. This is reflected in the comprehensive support provided to the sector. We are successfully implementing European action programmes on beekeeping. We support public extension services for the beekeeping sector, which, in addition to ensuring the conservation of the Carniolan honey bee and providing technological support to beekeepers, raise awareness among the general public on the importance of bees, and most importantly provides education and training.

Owing to the beekeeping measures and programmes financed by the state, the situation in beekeeping has improved in recent years. In the last decade the number of bee colonies and the number of beekeepers have increased significantly. Young people are showing a greater interest in beekeeping and the public is more aware of the importance of bees and the role of beekeeping.

By declaring World Bee Day, we wanted to expand and upgrade the activities aimed at raising public awareness of the importance of pollinators, bees and beekeeping and combine the efforts of all the countries of the world in the care for bees. The main purpose of World Bee Day is to contribute towards improved international cooperation in addressing global issues such as global food security, eradication of hunger and the preservation of the environment.

A few years ago, the Beekeeping Academy of Slovenia joined our international activities for strengthening knowledge on beekeeping and international development cooperation. The Academy assists in teaching beekeeping, thus contributing to the eradication of poverty and hunger, particularly in developing countries, where beekeeping can be an important activity, providing livelihood and decent work.

This year, Slovenia launched an initiative to set up a clearer system for the designation of origin of honey blends originating from more than one country. We are concerned that the current labelling of honey blends does not provide consumers with detailed and reliable information about the origin of honey. Therefore we launched, on the initiative of the Slovenian Beekeepers' Association, activities for amending the European Honey Directive in the part relating to the labelling of honey blends. We received wide support from like-minded countries and the European Commission announced that it would address this issue within the Farm to Fork Strategy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, when we are celebrating World Bee Day, an important European document will be published, namely the Farm to Fork Strategy, which is part of the European Green Deal aimed at ensuring the transition to a sustainable circular economy by 2050. The purpose of this sustainable food systems strategy is to ensure that Europeans will eat healthier food that will be produced sustainably, with minimal environmental pollution and impact on climate, while protecting biodiversity and enabling farmers and other actors in the chain to live a decent life. These are also the aims of World Bee Day.

Finally, I would like to again thank the FAO for its lasting support and cooperation in raising awareness of countries and farmers, as well as consumers and the general public, about the importance of bees and other pollinators. Slovenia will endeavour to ensure that this successful and productive cooperation continues.

By "be(e)ing engaged" we contribute to a better world and better future for us all.

Thank you.