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**JOINT STATEMENT FROM MEMBERS OF THE GREEN GROUP ON**

**THE OCCASION OF WORLD BEE DAY, 20 MAY 2021**

*On World Bee Day on 20 May 2021, the members of the Green Group – Cabo Verde, Costa Rica, Iceland, Singapore, Slovenia and the United Arab Emirates – reiterate the importance of bees for food security, sustainable farming and income, and for biodiversity and environmental protection.*

For the second consecutive year, we mark World Bee Day while many countries continue to deal with the widespread effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, disrupted food security, climate change effects and biodiversity decline. This gives us the opportunity to re-think how we relate to nature and what actions we can take to support pollinators and the millions of livelihoods that they in turn sustain.

Bees are a key part of the global food system pollinating 75% of our food crops. They increase biodiversity, provide micronutrient rich food, enable sustainable farming, and maintain ecosystems. Despite their vital role for life on our planet bees and other pollinators are under threat of extinction globally due to climate change, use of pesticides and other causes. Present species extinction rates are 100 to 1000 times higher than normal due to human impacts. This calls for immediate action to prevent their further decline.

In Costa Rica, actions to support the health of bee populations are being carried out at all levels. The private sector of beekeepers is committed with the management and protection of bees as a biological agent with agricultural importance, especially due their role in forest dynamics. Many local governments in the country have approved bills to become bee protectors, which is expected to be reflected in bee protection in land planning. In the Central Government, the National Animal Health Service (SENASA) has worked on training and genetic improvement through the National Beekeeping Program. On the other hand, the Ministry of the Environment and the National System of Conservation Areas are in the exploratory stage to design, with the input of different sectors, the National Plan for Conservation and Sustainable Use of Pollinators as established by the Convention on Biological Diversity. Finally, it is important to note that Costa Rica is part of the World Coalition of the Willing on Pollinators.

Iceland is actively working toward ecosystem restoration, which among other things improves soil quality, benefitting plants and consequently pollinators. Iceland’s cold climate is not well suited for beekeeping, which is therefore small-scale, but has nonetheless been growing in recent years. It benefits from the lack of pesticide use in Icelandic agriculture, which is very low. In general, Iceland emphasizes the importance of bees for biodiversity, crop production and general maintenance of ecosystems. Therefore, Iceland encourages countries of the world to restrict the use of pesticides and boost biological pest control for the benefit of our bees and other pollinators.

Singapore is undertaking a range of initiatives and educational programmes to conserve native bees. A key project is the “Bee Trail”, which features “bee hotels” (manmade bee nesting sites) and native bee forage plants. Over 40 bee species have been recorded along this trail. There are also programmes to introduce “bee hotels” into community gardens and, more recently, schools. Singapore also conducts workshops to equip citizen scientists with bee surveying skills during annual “Bioblitzes”. Bees were part of a national showcase about pollinators at the 2018 edition of the Festival of Biodiversity, an annual flagship event for biodiversity conservation and outreach in Singapore. In 2020, a guidebook on Singapore’s bee diversity was published to provide a resource for budding naturalists, citizen scientists and researchers to identify native bees. It is the first comprehensive guide to the bee fauna in Southeast Asia.

Slovenia continues its active engagement in support of sustainable beekeeping, raising awareness about the role of bees nationally and internationally. During its upcoming Presidency of the EU, Slovenia and the European Commission will co-host a conference on the role of pollinators. Slovenia and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) will mark the World Bee Day with a virtual event on 20 May 2021 under the theme “Bee engaged – Build Back Better for Bees”. The event will call for global cooperation and solidarity to counter the threats posed by the COVID-19 pandemic to food security and agricultural livelihoods alongside prioritizing environmental regeneration and pollinator protection. It will be an occasion to raise awareness of how everyone can make a difference to support, restore and enhance the role of pollinators. In the International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development, Slovenia and UNCTAD point to the role of creative economy for the protection of bees and other pollinators by promoting alternative, environmentally friendlier ways to live, produce and consume.

Given the environmental and economic importance of honeybees, the UAE views ensuring the sustainability of honey production as a priority. The country has adopted an integrated approach to developing the local beekeeping sector that involves implementing national import regulations in line with international standards, encouraging community farming and cultivation of native plants, engaging the private sector, and promoting the UAE honey market. Beekeepers can benefit from capacity-building and extension programmes as well as a comprehensive electronic manual on sustainable apiary management. The approach also includes a breeding project that aims to produce honeybee queens adapted to the local climate. Moreover, the country has rolled out complimentary e-services for honeybee imports and exports as well as the imports of honeybee feed and nutritional supplements. A national platform for local beekeepers is under development to inform decisions, facilitate communication between stakeholders, and help identify solutions to challenges facing the sector.

The Group will advocate for the invaluable role of bees and other pollinators in food systems as well as their inclusion to the work and outcomes of the UN Secretary General’s Food Systems Summit to take place this autumn in New York. As we celebrate 2021 as the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables, part of the Decade of Action on Nutrition, contribution of bees to food security is of particular importance in post-pandemic recovery.

The fifteenth Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Kunming, and the twenty-sixth meeting of the Conference of parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26) in Glasgow provide an opportunity to raise awareness that everyone can make a difference to support, restore and enhance the role of pollinators.

Members of the Green Group will be actively engaged throughout the year highlighting the indispensable role of bees and pollinators for sustainable food systems and agriculture, biodiversity protection, climate change mitigation and poverty alleviation.