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PRESS RELEASE



December 5 is the World Soil Day but in Europe soil is not recognized as a common good

For the first time 430 organisations joined together to ask Europe to give a right to soil with #PEOPLE4SOIL petition

Imagine a medium sized nation, such as Hungary, Portugal or the Czech Republic. Now imagine the *whole* surface of that nation covered by concrete and asphalt: that is the amount of agricultural land taken by human settlement and infrastructures, over the last fifty years, in the 28 EU Countries. Furthermore, soil is being consumed at an alarming rate, not withstanding the crisis affecting the building sector in many countries: each year, some 1000 km² of formerly cultivated areas are erased by new constructions. At the same time, the European commodities market is covering its growing needs for crops and animal food by importing them from third countries, where intensive agriculture extends its pressure over millions of small farmers, pushing them to abandon their fields to migrate towards the suburban areas. It is a striking contradiction for a continental Union, which arose with the objective of insuring food security for all the citizens and, now, is trying to manage relevant flows of migrants coming from subsaharian Africa, where many fields are cultivated for European companies.

Land used for urbanisation is only the tip of the iceberg, as soil in Europe faces many threats and damages: over 250.000 sites have chemically contaminated soil, almost half of the agricultural soils are threatened by the depletion of organic matter, tenths of millions hectares are damaged by wind and rain erosion and desertification is advancing in many Mediterranean countries, making their cultivations more and more sensitive to droughts and climate changes.

"Europe has the duty to preserve its most important natural resource: soil" This is the call by the promoters of the ECI (European Citizens Initiative) 'People4soil'. The ECI is an official petition to the European Commission, asking this institution to develop a specific legal framework, fixing principles and rules to be complied by each Member State. Nowadays, there is no legal acknowledgement for the ecological, social and economical services that healthy soils are able to provide to European people, nor legal duties for parties to achieve a common target, e.g. with regard to the remediation of polluted soil, or the safeguard of the soil carbon sinks, or the prevention of soil sealing by settlements and infrastructures. This is precisely what the People4Soil network wants to change. The first 25.000 signatures have already been gathered on the official website of the petition: www.people4soil.eu. "All adult European citizens can sign". The organizers stress: "We have two very challenging targets: gather one million signatures within september 2017 and gain the full acknowledgement of soil as a common heritage to be protected, for the wellbeing of European people!"

LIST OF PEOPLE4SOIL MAIN PARTNERS:

EEB - European Environmental Bureau (Network)

Slow Food International (NGO)

Birdlife International - Europe and Central Asia (NGO)

Greenpeace European Unit (NGO)

IFOAM - Organics International (NGO)

IFOAM EU (NGO)

Naturfreunde Internationale (Network)

CAN - Climate Action Network Europe (Network)
PAN - Pesticide Action Network Europe (NGO)
Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations (Network)
Compassion in World Farming (NGO)
Save Our Soils (Network)
ESSC - European Society for Soil Conservation (Research institute)
ECAAF - European Conservation Agriculture Federation (Network)
IAAS - International Association for students in Agriculture and related Sciences (NGO)
Society for Ecological Restoration Europe (Network)
Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the EU (Network)
Eurosite (NGO)
Youth and Environment Europe (Network)
ELD - Economics of Land Degradation Initiative (Initiative)
ISDE - International Society Doctors for the Environment (NGO)
Global Soil Forum (Forum)
Friends of the Earth Europe (NGO)
Wetlands International European Association (Network)

People4Soil c/o Legambiente Onlus Via A. Bono Cairoli 22, 20127 Milan (Italy)

T: +39 0287386480 mob +39 3929516320 info@people4soil.eu