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PRESS RELEASE

UNITED NATIONS DECLARES 20 MAY WORLD BEE DAY

New York, 20 December – Today, the United Nations General Assembly adopted by consensus a resolution declaring 20 May as World Bee Day. Every year on this day, the attention of the global public will be drawn to the importance of preserving bees and other pollinators. People will be reminded of the importance of bees for the entire humanity and invited to take concrete action to preserve and protect them. The resolution was co-sponsored by 115 UN Member States, including the USA, Canada, China, the Russian Federation, India, Brazil, Argentina, Australia and all the European Union Member States.

Dejan Židan – head of the World Bee Day project and Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, the country that proposed the proclamation of World Bee Day to the UN in response to an initiative of the Slovenian Beekeepers' Association – expressed his satisfaction at the outcome: *"After three years of efforts both in terms of the official procedures at the UN and with regard to the intensive process of informing countries around the world, we have succeeded with this initiative. Bees and other pollinators finally have the place they deserve in view of their importance for the world and for humanity. The proclamation of World Bee Day proves that the will to take action does exist. I am happy that realization of the importance of bees for sustainable development and the future of humanity in general has reflected in the consensual support to the resolution."*

Mr Židan also took the opportunity to thank all countries for their support, but ended with a warning: *"This is just the beginning of the difficult process of the protection of bees and other pollinators. In order to be successful, we must bring on board the governments of all countries, the business community and civil society. Awareness of the vital importance of saving the bees must reach every individual. And we must do more than just talk – we must undertake concrete activities to increase care for bees and promote the development of beekeeping – everywhere, including in developing countries."*

Carla Mucavi, Director of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Liaison Office in New York, commented: *"Bees play a crucial role in increasing crop yields and promoting food security and nutrition. Without them, we could lose a variety of food such as potatoes, pepper, coffee, pumpkins, carrots, apples, almonds, tomatoes, just to name a few. In short, without bees, FAO cannot achieve a world without hunger. World Bee Day*

recognizes the importance of these tiny helpers and will increase awareness of the need to protect them."

"I believe we all agree that every human being on this planet deserves food every day. We have to produce more food every day, and every day more food is dependent on pollinators – with honey bees in the lead. To talk about reducing global hunger without ensuring conditions for the survival of bees and other pollinators, is simply throwing sand in people's eyes! It is time for everyone to listen to bees, in particular leaders and those who make decisions," said Boštjan Noč, promoter of the World Bee Day initiative and president of the Slovenian Beekeepers' Association, adding: *"From today on, 20 May will be a worldwide celebration of bees and beekeepers. I believe that with the proclamation of World Bee Day, the world will begin to think more broadly about bees, in particular in the context of ensuring conditions for their survival, and thus for the survival of the human race."*

More detailed information about 20th May and the importance of bees

Slovenia proposed the celebration of World Bee Day in the month of May, when bees in the northern hemisphere are most active and begin to reproduce. This is also the period in which the need for pollination is greatest. In the southern hemisphere it is autumn, a time for harvesting bee products and days and weeks of honey. The chosen day, 20 May, is also the birthday of Anton Janša (1734–1773), a pioneer of modern beekeeping and one of the greatest experts in this field in his day. He was the first teacher of modern beekeeping anywhere in the world, appointed by the Empress Maria Theresa as a permanent teacher at the new beekeeping school in Vienna.

Studies of United Nations and the International Union for Conservation of Nature show that bee populations and the populations of other pollinators have significantly decreased, making them more and more endangered. This is affected by numerous factors which are the consequence of human activity: intensive agriculture, widespread use of pesticides and pollution caused by waste. Bees are exposed to new diseases and pests. The living environment of bees is shrinking due to the ever-increasing number of the global population. Their survival and development are also threatened by climate change.

The extinction of bees will not only deprive the world of a species, but it may have drastic consequences for entire ecosystems and human race. The data of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations show that bees and other pollinators are priceless when it comes to ensuring the global safety of the food supply chain. A third of all food produced in the world, i.e. every third spoon of food, depends on pollination. The international study of Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) in 2016 estimated that between US\$ 235 billion and US\$ 577 billion worth of annual global food production relies on direct contributions by pollinators.

In addition, agricultural plants which require pollination are an important source of jobs and income for farmers, particularly for small and family farms in developing countries. Last but not least, bees have an important role in the preservation of the ecological balance and biodiversity in nature. Bees as good bioindicators of environmental conditions inform us that something is happening to the environment and that we must take action.

Prompt protection of bees and other pollinators will significantly contribute to solving problems with global food supply and eliminating hunger. It will also contribute to efforts to halt further loss of biodiversity and degradation of ecosystems, as well as to the objectives of

sustainable development defined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Slovenian initiative to declare World Bee Day

In 2015 these considerations led the Republic of Slovenia, at the initiative of the Slovenian Beekeepers' Association, to begin procedures at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for the declaration of World Bee Day and to propose a resolution underlining the importance of bees and other pollinators. The initiative has been endorsed by the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations at its 40th Session in Rome on 7 July 2017; and the procedure was successfully concluded today with the consensual adoption of the World Bee Day Resolution by the UN General Assembly.

Slovenia is one of the top countries in the world in terms of the number of beekeepers per capita, with every 200th inhabitant a beekeeper. For tens of thousands of Slovenian citizens, beekeeping is a way of life with a long tradition. The bee, in particular the indigenous Carniolan honey bee, is part of Slovenian national identity. Slovenia is the only country in the European Union to have introduced legal protection for its bees. In 2011 it became one of the first countries in the EU to prohibit the use of certain pesticides harmful to bees.

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Additional information and contacts

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