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Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Executive Board

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206 EX/41

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Item 41 of the provisional agenda

WORLD OLIVE TREE DAY: 26 NOVEMBER

SUMMARY

This item has been included in the provisional agenda of the 206th session of the Executive Board at the request of Lebanon and Tunisia.

The corresponding explanatory note and draft decision are included in this document.

Financial implications: none/extrabudgetary.

Action expected of the Executive Board: proposed decision in paragraph 17.



Job: 201903424

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Introduction

1. The wild variety of the olive tree is believed to date back to sometime between 11,000 and 14,000 years ago. Its spread is strongly correlated with the emergence of the Mediterranean climate. The olive tree is thought to have been domesticated sometime between 3800 and 3200 BCE, and its lifespan can reach 3,000 years.
2. A fabled plant, the olive tree is rich in symbolism, representing strength, fertility, wealth, peace, conviviality and light, among other attributes. Its importance and value are illustrated by the multiple references to the tree that are found in Mediterranean mythology, literature and the sacred books of many religions, including the Torah, the Bible, and the Qur'an.
3. The olive tree, which has its origins in the Mediterranean region, is a **universal symbol of peace and harmony**; a wreath of olive branches is **emblazoned not only on the flag of the United Nations, but also on the flags of other organizations and States**. Today, the olive tree is grown in all five continents and contributes to the **sustainable economic and social development** of many countries and to the **preservation of natural resources**.
4. Initially limited to the agricultural and alimentary, the tree's uses have expanded over time, extending to the various spheres of human activity. Olive products are used in everything from lighting, construction and decoration to the pharmaceutical and sanitary industries. A treasure trove of cultural resources, the olive tree inspires artists and is typically used as a decorative motif in local handicraft. It is also a fount of popular culture (giving rise to stories, legends, songs, poetry, proverbs, and more).
5. A proven source of **nutrition and health**, the fruit of this mythic tree, with its myriad aromas and flavours, stimulates imagination and creativity, leading to any number of culinary and cultural expressions. The olive's therapeutic virtues, moreover, are recognized worldwide.
6. **An agent in the fight against global warming and pollution**, olive cultivation has a positive carbon balance, capturing more CO₂ than the greenhouse gases emitted during its cycle and during the production process for both virgin and extra-virgin olive oil.
7. On 26 November every year, the States Members of the International Olive Council celebrate World Olive Day together to share their message: "**Choose olives to protect our planet and our health!**"

Why celebrate the World Olive Tree Day?

8. Since ancient times, the olive tree has inspired poets, writers, singers and painters who have created countless works of art in which the tree symbolizes longevity, hope, peace and reconciliation, victory, strength and loyalty.
9. The olive tree is a cultural element that features prominently in numerous universal artistic and cultural expressions.
10. Olive cultivation has a long history and holds a particular place in the realm of human activity, making it a determining factor in cultural identity and attachment to the land for both individuals and communities.
11. For 6,000 years, **olive cultivation** took place nearly exclusively in the Mediterranean region until, in recent decades, it began to **spread gradually to other parts of the world**. Today, it has extended to all five continents: olives are grown in 56 countries. The world's olive-cultivation heritage comprises nearly 1.5 billion trees, which cover an area of approximately 11.4 million hectares and

produce between 17 and 21 million tonnes of olives. Every second, 10 olive trees are planted in the world.

12. **The olive sector** contributes to the sustainable economic and social development of numerous countries and **employs millions of men and women throughout the world**. Since 1995, an average of 154,000 additional hectares of olive groves – some 40 million olive trees – have been planted each year. The worldwide surface area used for olive cultivation grows at a rate of 1% annually. With the introduction of new cultivation zones, global olive oil production could reach 4 million tonnes per year in 2020.

13. Scientific research continues to confirm the beneficial characteristics of olives and the “liquid gold” they produce. Olive oil, it is worth noting, is **a basic component of the Mediterranean diet and of diets in other parts of the world**.

14. Olives and olive oil, proven sources of nutrition and health, are now consumed worldwide and **sold in over 174 countries**.

15. Olive production is an essential activity in less competitive rural areas. **Olive trees provide a barrier against desertification and afford protection from erosion; they also act as a carbon sink. Olive cultivation plays a fundamental role in slowing rural migration, helping people put down roots and creating an attachment to the land.**

16. Recent scientific studies have shown that the adoption of proper agricultural practices makes it possible to increase the capacity for atmospheric CO₂ fixation in permanent vegetative structures (biomass) and soil. In addition to its carbon balance, the olive tree’s water footprint provides a sound argument for the promotion of olive products, since nearly 70% of the world’s olive groves are managed with no irrigation. Olive cultivation is an activity that requires little water and is generally practiced with environmental protection in mind.

Proposed decision

17. In the light of the above, the Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Having examined document 206 EX/41,
2. Considering that the olive tree, a symbol of peace, wisdom and harmony, contributes to the sustainable economic and social development of peoples, and that the celebration of the World Olive Tree Day will help to promote these universal values, which unite people and cultures,
3. Also considering that the olive tree has been an element of both unity and diversity in all cultures since time immemorial, transcending borders and enabling fruitful exchanges between peoples,
4. Recognizing the role of the olive tree as a cultural element which features prominently in numerous artistic and cultural expressions, its role as a vehicle for cultural dialogue and knowledge-sharing, and its contribution to development,
5. Emphasizing that the olive tree plays a fundamental role in helping communities put down roots in the regions where they live,
6. Noting that olive trees provide a barrier against desertification and afford protection from erosion,

7. Also recognizing that the olive tree is an agent in the fight against global warming and captures more CO₂ than the greenhouse gases emitted during the olive cultivation cycle and the olive oil production process,
8. Further recognizing the olive sector's impact on employment and environmental preservation and its concomitant contribution to sustainable development,
9. Recognizing the health benefits of olive oil, as well as its therapeutic properties and dietetic benefits,
10. Also noting that the celebration of the World Olive Tree Day will help to protect this ancient plant and preserve its long-standing value, and that such celebration will have no financial implications for UNESCO's regular budget and will be funded with extrabudgetary resources,
 1. Welcomes and endorses the recommendation to proclaim 26 November of each year the World Olive Tree Day;
 2. Invites the Director-General to support all efforts leading to the proclamation of the World Olive Tree Day;
 3. Recommends that this item be included in the agenda of the 40th session of the General Conference;
 4. Also recommends that the General Conference at its 40th session adopt the draft decision proclaiming 26 November of each year the World Olive Tree Day.