**IYPH 2020 – Advocacy Document 1**

The following document is intended to provide background information and justification for the proclamation of an International Year of Plant Health in 2020.

It is intended for National Plant Protection Organizations to be utilized as background information when informing political decision makers and other stakeholders about the initiative IYPH 2020.

It can be attached to or included in national memos or press releases. It can also be translated and placed on web-sites of NPPOs or RPPOs.

The advocacy document has been provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland. It does not reflect any positions or views of FAO and the IPPC!

**Initiative for an International Year of Plant Health in 2020**

*The need for more efficient national, regional and international initiatives*

A key factor in any strategy to eliminate hunger and rural poverty must be the protection of plant health from pests and diseases. Productivity of crops grown for human consumption is increasingly at risk due to the incidence of pests, especially weeds, pathogens and animal pests. Crop losses due to these pests can be substantial. There are estimates that the potential losses caused by pests can be as high as 50%, globally.

In particular pests which have been introduced into new ecosystems can have devastating effects on food security and the environment. A pest epidemic of enormous proportions due to an introduced fruit fly is just underway in Africa. The vast increase in the international trade of agricultural commodities as well as the effects of climate change epitomizes a dramatic increase in the risk of pest introductions. New pathways and disturbed ecological conditions set the perfect conditions for future pest epidemics of major proportions.

While the pest risks are increasing globally, national efforts to combat these risks are surprisingly decreasing. Resources committed to plant health are reduced, often significantly so, in most countries. Plant health research, taxonomical and diagnostic services are diminishing on national levels. Plant protection services world-wide are facing more and more risks with fewer resources available. Already in 2004, the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization declared a “State of Emergency” for plant health.

To address these concerns it is imperative to raise the national, regional and global awareness about plant health and its beneficial effects on food security, poverty reduction and environmental protection. With a better awareness of the benefits of plant health it should be possible to strengthen national, regional and international plant health initiatives, to the benefit of mankind.

Although an international programme exists which addresses plant health, the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), this is by no means sufficient or efficient to address future challenges. It is crucial to strengthen national, regional and international plant health programmes and initiatives to prevent losses to agricultural production and biodiversity. Even though least developed and developing countries would benefit most from an International Year of Plant Health because of their apparent structural deficiencies, benefits are attributable to all countries. An International Year of Plant Health would be a truly global initiative uniting beneficiaries from developed to developing countries and agricultural to industrialized societies.

An International Year of Plant Health in 2020 will have enormous impetus for the realization of FAO’s strategic objectives. It will also create a stimulus for better and environmentally sounder agricultural production. Mankind’s formidable challenge to increase food production by 50% to meet the projected demand of the world’s population by 2050 is only possible through better and more effective plant health.

An International Year of Plant Health in 2020 would serve as a trigger to make national, regional and international plant health systems stronger and more responsive to face the plant health challenges of the future.