



### Regional Baltic Wildland Fire Network Meeting

Ministry of the Interior and Finnish Forest Research Institute, Helsinki, Finland, 10 May 2004

#### Rationale

In compliance with the objectives of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR), the policy of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the recommendations of the International Wildland Fire Summit (Sydney, Australia, 8 October 2003), aimed at reducing the negative impacts of wildland fires on humanity and the global environment and promotion of the application of methods of integrated and sustainable wildland fire management, a Regional Baltic Wildland Fire Meeting will be convened in Helsinki. The meeting will be held on 10 May 2004, in Helsinki, Finland.

The Meeting is organised by the Ministry of the Interior of Finland and the Finnish Forest Research Institute in collaboration with the United Nations (UN) through the ISDR Regional Baltic Wildland Fire Network, the FAO Forestry Department, the ECE/FAO/ILO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire and the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC).



#### Overall Goal of the Meeting

The meeting aims to adopt the strategic recommendations of the Summit and encourage the countries bordering the Baltic Sea to develop agreements for cooperation in forest fire management. One of the driving reasons for organizing this meeting is the increased wildfire risk due to climate change resulting in weather extremes. At the same time urbanisation of the rural population has led to decreased skills among the public to manage fires. Consequently forest fire research, technology development and mutual cooperation in fire management must receive increasing attention.



International Forest Fire News (IFFN) is an activity of the FAO/UNECE Team of Specialists on Forest Fire and the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC). IFFN is published on behalf of UNECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission and is serving the UN-ISDR Global Wildland Fire Network (GWFN). For the complete IFFN archive see: <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/iffn/iffn.htm>

## **Main Objectives**

- To activate regional cooperation and mutual assistance in Forest Fire Management in the Baltic region
- To define and discuss the main problems and achievements in forest fire management in the Baltic countries
- To identify and discuss ongoing forest fire research activities and the interests to develop a regional research network in the Baltic region
- To support and enhance the networks, information sharing and research activity in forest fire management in the Baltic region

## **Opening Address by Mr. Pentti Partanen, Director General, Department for Rescue Services, Ministry of the Interior, Finland**

Forest fires cause problems that many countries face every year. These fires have an impact on the destruction of vegetation, on atmospheric pollution and directly on human lives. I believe that all the countries have the common goal to reduce the number of uncontrolled fires and to mitigate the damage in case of a fire. However, we have to keep in mind that forest fires are also necessary for certain species and vegetation. This is especially the case in countries like Finland. This is also the reason why prescribed burnings are used more and more today. From the point of view of rescue services prescribed burnings are acceptable as long as they can be managed and controlled.

The forest fire system in Finland consists of three elements: prevention, early warning and extinguishing. In all these three elements educational, legislative and technical means are applied.

Over 60 % of the forest fires are caused by human action. In Finland arson is very rare but the people living in the cities do not realise the actual risk of a forest fire as well as in the past. Therefore it is clear that we have to focus on prevention of fires. Prevention is based on the forest fire warning system. The forest fire warning is issued when the fire index has reached a given threshold value. The index resembles the dryness of the terrain. A duty meteorologist at the Finnish Meteorological Institute makes the decision on forest fire warnings. This means that during a forest fire warning, certain regulations come into force such as prohibition to set an open fire in the forest or near the forest as enacted in the Rescue Act. Forest fire warnings are issued to the public on television and radio several times a day in weather forecasts. In Finland people in general respect the forest fire warning and act accordingly. So in forest fire prevention technical element is a forest fire index calculation and it is reinforced by legislation i.e. prohibition to set an open fire and by means of education we try to get people to understand what are the risks during a forest fire warning.

To get an early warning people are supposed to react when they see that something is wrong. In practice this means that they don't ignore the situation and that they also make the alarm to the number 112. In legislation this is also considered as an every man's obligation to inform the emergency response centre about accidents. This works very good in Finland and more than 90 percent of the alarms come from individual people. In fact the mobile phones have made this faster because people can make a call right away. This is reinforced by technical applications such as airborne surveys and satellite observation and alarm system in order to get as early warning as possible if people haven't detected fires before that. It should be mentioned that this satellite monitoring and alarm system is unique in the world and it detects fires in Finland, Sweden, Norway, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and western parts of Russia i.e. Karelia.

The third part of the system is a fast response. Risk assessment is based on law and the regional rescue services have to assess the risks, also the forest fire risk, and according the risk assessment they should have suitable manpower and equipment to handle forest fires. In Finland fast response is arranged by the 22 regional rescue services. This new system has been started in the beginning of this year and of course the fire stations and the responding units are scattered to the whole area according the risks. In Finland the forest fire suppression base on the use of ground units because in Finland forest fires are usually quite small and the units can get near the fires because of extensive timber road network and reasonable flat topography. Also the lakes function as natural restriction lines and help keeping the fires small. In addition to ground forces also aerial means such as helicopters and airplanes are used in large fires.

Forest fire system in Finland seems to be quite effective. When in the 1950's about 6 000 hectares was burned in a year in the 1990's only about 600 hectares was burned yearly. Our goal is to keep uncontrolled fires at the same level or smaller than in the 1990's also in the future.

However, the ministry of the interior has invested to forest fire research under the last few years and we have close cooperation with the Finnish Forest Research Institute and the universities. As I already mentioned in the beginning the reason is that prescribed burnings will be used more in the future and that the climate is slowly becoming warmer. Of course there is always a risk that prescribed burnings cannot be controlled and that is why we also need to educate people how to make prescribed burnings in a safe way. Special courses on prescribed burning methods have been arranged in the emergency services college under the last few years.

Finland has been quite active in the international level as far as forests and forest fire management is considered. When we are talking about UN a lot of Finnish know-how has been used especially in the developing countries in order to build forest fire management system e.g. Indonesia, Thailand, Nepal, Philippines, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique and Burkina Faso. Finland has also been active in the EU.

We are in a changing situation right now also in the Baltic region. Almost all the countries represented here are now members of EU. As we all know EU is strengthening its mechanism. In this respect it is crucial that EU and UN cooperate as good as possible so that we won't have overlapping arrangements. It is clear that in any case we need regional approach especially when we talk about mutual assistance. By that I mean that assistance is the more effective the closer and faster it comes.

On the behalf of the Ministry of the Interior I welcome you all to Helsinki. I hope that this seminar will be fruitful and I am looking forward the recommendations.

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## **Helsinki Declaration on Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management in the Baltic Region**

10 May 2004

### **The participants of the Regional Baltic Wildland Fire Meeting:**

- Recalling the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) and its Wildland Fire Advisory Group in supporting to harmonize and strengthen efforts by the United Nations agencies and programmes, as well as other international organizations including non-government organizations, to reduce the negative impacts of wildland fires on the environment, and to support the application of prescribed fire for the benefit of ecosystem stability and sustainability;
- Endorsing the ISDR-FAO-GFMC Framework for the Development of the International Wildland Fire Accord of 5 May 2004, outlining the concerted international efforts towards international cooperation in wildland fire management;
- Endorsing the goal of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations to promote and strengthen bilateral and multilateral agreements for cooperation in fire management,
- Recognizing and supporting the goals and joint endeavours of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the UN Forum of Forests (UNFF) and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, to protect the global vegetation resources and the global atmosphere from negative influences by vegetation fires, as well as the promotion of knowledge and techniques to utilize the beneficial role of fire in ecosystem management,

- Recognizing and supporting the recommendations of the ECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Forest Fires and the recommendations of BALTEX FIRE 2000 (Baltic Exercise for Fire Information and Resources Exchange), concerning international cooperation in wildland fire management between the countries bordering the Baltic Sea;
- Endorsing the recommendations of the International Wildland Fire Summit (Sydney – 2003) concerning common international standards for fire management and the strategy for strengthening international cooperation in wildland fire management,
- Supporting the objectives of the ISDR Global Wildland Fire Network and its Secretariat, the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), to systematically enhance the intra- and inter-regional cooperation in wildland fire management throughout the world,
- Referring to the objectives of the Forests Sector of the Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea Region
- Referring to the Helsinki Convention Article 15 concerning nature conservation and biodiversity of the coastal ecosystems
- Encouraging the EU to develop protocols and agreement for mutual assistance in wildland fire disaster management
- Encouraging the EU, UN-OCHA, NATO / EADRRC and GFMC to agree on procedures for coordination in international response to (wildland fire) disasters
- Welcoming the availability of the Ministry of the Interior of Finland -- the host institution of this meeting -- and the delegates of participating nations of the Baltic Region to actively cooperate to share experience and resources in wildland fire management
- Concluding from the national case studies and analyses on the wildland fire situation in the participating countries, as well as from the discussions held at the conference, that the majority of countries in the region are available to establish and strengthen a regional dialogue on cooperation in wildland fire research and management
- Expressing the intent to jointly overcome the currently existing gaps, deficits and problems related to
  - The high number of emerging new private small forest owners in Baltic States that have problems to conduct the necessary measures in forest fire management
  - Depopulation and abandonment of country sites, with consequences on changes in vegetation composition, succession, fuel loads, resulting in an increased wildfire hazard
  - Large-scale establishment of exotic tree plantations such as *Pinus contorta* that represent a high wildfire risk for the future
  - Uncontrolled use of agricultural fires that are a major cause of wildfires in forests and other wildlands
  - Lack of local awareness and knowledge of principles in fire ecology and fire management
  - Prescribed burning policies have difficult acceptance by the public and authorities in some countries
  - Lack of finances for fire management systems in some countries
  - Lack of a fire reporting system that allows to distinguish the economic and ecological consequences of fire, i.e. between the various degrees of damages or benefits caused by fire
  - Training for wildland / forest fire management / suppression inadequate in most countries of the region, especially concerning the ability to respond to large and long-lasting fire situations
  - Lack of adequate fire suppression equipment and protecting clothing in most countries
  - Need of further development of fire danger rating systems
  - Aerial assets not necessarily available due to competing demands

**Recommend the following **Helsinki Plan of Action for Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management in the Baltic Region****

(1) The countries participating at the conference encourage governments to develop or strengthen, and international organizations to support

- Bilateral and multilateral agreements on cooperation in wildland fire management, based on international standards as proposed by the FAO and the International Wildland Fire Summit
- Investigate the introduction of the Incident Command System (ICS) as the international standard for all wildland incident management participating in international or interagency agreements and exchanges.
- Cooperative regional wildland fire research projects and programmes
- Decision-support systems for large fire situations
- Training / capacity building in wildland fire management
- Community involvement in fire management

(2) To regularly conduct follow-up activities aimed at further promoting collaborative efforts and procedures

- Bilateral and multilateral wildland fire emergency exercises, like those to be conducted between Estonia and Latvia in June 2004, or the NATO PfP exercise RM-04 in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in 2004
- Exchange visits and programmes to share lessons learned and solving problems
- Updating online (Internet) access to information related to regional wildland fire management issues
- Regional Baltic Wildland Fire meetings should be organized every 2 to 3 years. The next Baltic meeting shall be organized in 2006.

(3) To investigate the necessity to develop arrangements to support collection and dissemination of wildland fire information, facilitation of regular regional dialogue and joint projects between the countries, and to technically support countries in need of aerial assets for wildland fire suppression by the creation of

- Special regional mobile airborne fire response units, based on Public-Private Partnership arrangements

(4) To inform national governments about the need to prepare statements in favour of enhancing international cooperation in wildland fire management at the following forums:

- The World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) (Kobe-Hyogo, Japan, January 2005)
- The FAO high-level meeting at COFO 2005, devoted to wildland fire management and international cooperation (Rome, Italy, March 2005)

**Delegates of the following countries and international organizations participated at the meeting:**

- Estonia
- Finland
- Germany
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Sweden
- United Kingdom
- Russian Federation
  
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
- ECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire
- UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN- ISDR), Wildland Fire Advisory Group and Global Wildland Fire Network
- Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC)
- International Technical Committee on the Prevention and Extinction of Fire (CTIF), Forest Fire Commission

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