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Macedonia: Forest Fires Situation Report No. 1

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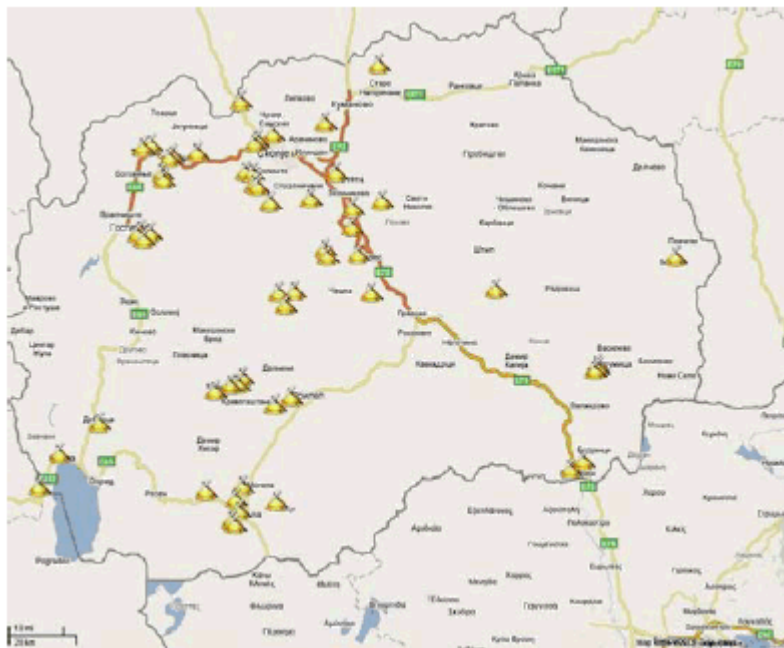
This situation report is based on information received from the UN Resident Coordinator Office in Macedonia.

Summary

- The Government declared a national crisis situation on 18 July in view of the numerous fires affecting 3,000 hectares of forest;
- The Government requested international assistance.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

1. Since the beginning of July 2007, Macedonia has been experiencing enormous forest fires which have been aggravated by very high temperatures since 17 July. As a result, one human casualty has been reported due to smoke poisoning, 200 Roma people (approximately 45 families) have been evacuated and 3,000 Ha of forest in 32 municipalities have been lost. The risk of larger number of civilians being poisoned by the smoke is increasing every day. According to the Ministry of Health (MoH), the number of people looking for first aid is increasing.
2. The most affected part is the region of Bitola (South-West) where 12 Roma houses burned. The Fire Fighting (FF) reported more than 50 active fires during the past week. The number of fires is changing on a daily basis, varying from more than 20 on 21 July to 39 on 26 July. Local and national authorities are taking necessary arrangements to provide assistance but resources are limited.
3. The Tetovo region (West) is affected with 4 active fires. The fires are considered dangerous in view of their proximity to a 400KW electrical sub-station on the lake of Kozjak in the surroundings of Saraj (a suburb a few kilometres away from Skopje). In the Central part of the country, the area of Veles is also affected.
4. Fires are under control in Bucin, Sveta, Krusevo and Suvodol; hence, the initially planned evacuation of the population did not take place. Forest fires in Bitola were finally put under control. In the Strumica region (south) there has been an active fire since 20 July. The FF Unit, local inhabitants and the Public Company reported being able to control the fire but their capability could decrease rapidly, depending on the weather conditions. Based on information received from the Crisis Management Centre as well as from the Red Cross of Macedonia there is no need for massive evacuation of the population.



6. The evacuated Roma population placed in the vicinity of Bitola is in need of basic hygiene kits, multivitamin biscuits, bottled water, pasteurized milk, blanket, bed sheets, pillows and towels as well as summer clothes and nappies.

NATIONAL RESPONSE

7. On 18 July the Government declared a crisis situation for the entire territory and requested international assistance from the United Nations, the European Union Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) and the NATO Euro-Atlantic disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADCCR).

8. The Government's Crisis Management Centre (CMC) is meeting on a daily basis to assess the emergency situation and changes on the ground. National efforts have been mobilised and the Government of Macedonia has so far (through CMC, DPR, Army, the Red Cross of Macedonia, Public Forest Enterprises, Fire Fighters as well as other forces at local level) engaged 3 air planes (private owned), 2 army helicopters as well 420 soldiers. These are additional forces that, based on the recommendation from the CMC, were engaged to support the ongoing activities to resolve the current situation.

9. The Red Cross of Macedonia has mobilized its First Aid teams in 29 of the most affected municipalities.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

10. International assistance so far secured is oriented towards fire fighting (one Croatian airplane with a squad of 10 people, 1 helicopter from Slovenia; 1 helicopter from Germany; one helicopter and one airplane from Turkey.). Austria has also offered 2 national experts from the Austrian fire brigades. Sweden sent 2 national experts to assess the situation. Poland donated fire extinguishing material and bottled mineral water (scheduled to reach the country on 29 July). The NGO "Pompiers de l'Urgence Internationale France" is in contact with the Ambassador of the Republic of Macedonia to propose assistance. Estonia offered a financial support of 31, 956 EUR intended for the procurement of fire fighting equipment.

11. Based on the UNRC request to UNDP-BCPR, a cash grant of USD 100,000 has been released from BCPR to support the Regional Crisis Management Centres in coordination, assessment and logistics. OCHA has also offered an Emergency Cash Grant of USD 30,000.

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