



UNITED NATIONS



UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network

Coordinator and Secretariat: Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), Freiburg, Germany ¹

Recommendations for the Development of an International Wildland Fire Accord

1. Introduction

This statement reflects the outcomes of the consultations of the UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group (WFAG) / Global Wildland Fire Network (GWFN) and the International Wildland fire Summit during 2003-2004, in particular the recommendations directed to the FAO and UNFF Ministerial Meetings on Forests (Rome, March 2005 - New York, May 2005) and the UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) (Kobe, Japan, January 2005).²

Statement on the utilized terminology: The UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group (WFAG) / Global Wildland Fire Network (GWFN) and the documents prepared by the FAO for the Ministerial Meeting on Forests and the 17th Session of COFO are calling for the development of an "International Wildland Fire Accord". In many circumstances the term "Accord" is used to refer to a formal, approved, and binding instrument. However, the drafters of the declarations of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks and the FAO Regional Forestry Commissions did not intend the Accord to be a formal document, such as a Convention or Agreement, that would require ratification by governments, nor did they intend this to be a binding arrangement under international law. They rather intended that the term "International Wildland Fire Accord" would express a consensus of the international community to coordinate and strengthen international cooperation in wildland fire management.

In order to clarify that intention, some have suggested changing the term Accord to either "Framework" or "Strategy". It is recognized, however, that these terms may not accurately describe the intended document or the ministerial statement. The final term to be chosen should be agreeable by the international community.

2. Rationale

Over the past decade, many regions of the world have experienced a growing trend of excessive fire application in land-use systems and land-use change, and an increasing occurrence of extremely severe wildfires. Some of the effects of wildland fires are transboundary, for example smoke and water pollution and its impacts on human health and safety, loss of biodiversity or site degradation at a landscape level leading to desertification or flooding. The depletion of terrestrial carbon by fires burning under extreme conditions in some vegetation types, including organic terrain in peatland biomes, is one of the driving agents of disturbance of global biogeochemical cycles, notably the global carbon cycle. This trend is causing the international community to address the problem collectively and collaboratively. The consultations of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks in 2004 recommended the development of informal partnerships, joint projects and formal agreements between government and non-governmental institutions that are essential to enable nations to develop sustainable fire

¹ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/>

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² http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/Rationale%20and%20Introduction_1.html

management capabilities. Therefore the Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network proposes the development of an international wildland fire accord.

3. Transition From Individual Projects to a Coordinated International Response to the Escalating Global Wildland Fire Problem

In response to increasing wildland fire problems in recent years governments, non-government organizations and the international community began to address the underlying causes of unwanted wildfires and the lack of understanding of the proper use of natural fires and management fires (prescribed burning). Since the late 1990s projects and programmes conducted at country, regional and international levels began to work cooperatively, aiming at sharing resources in wildland fire management – including mutual support in wildland fire emergencies - and capacity building. Examples include:

- ♦ SE Asia: International donors coordinated their response to the fire and smoke episode during and after the El Niño of 1997-98 (e.g., cooperation between GTZ, USFS/USAID, EU, JICA, CIDA)
- ♦ ASEAN: Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution signed in 2002 and being implemented
- ♦ Exchange of fire fighting personnel and mutual support based on bilateral memoranda of understanding and other agreements between countries, e.g. between the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Mexico and others.
- ♦ Border-crossing wildfire emergency response in the Mediterranean region (Portugal, Morocco, Syria, France, Spain)
- ♦ Recommendation for the development of international standards in wildland fire management and response mechanisms by the UN and the International Wildland Fire Summit (ANNEX B)
- ♦ Establishment of the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), the ISDR Global Wildland Fire Network which is operating through Regional Wildland Fire Networks, involving government, non-government and academic bodies
- ♦ Agreement on a roadmap toward the development of an international accord for cooperation in wildland fire management (by GFMC, FAO and GOFCC-GOLD)³
- ♦ Establishment of the ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group as an advisory body to the UN

With this level of effort and success comes the responsibility of the international community to build and assist those who are attempting to address this issue. While more people, groups and governments are involved than ever before, the majority of the world can benefit from a stronger level of cooperation. Many individuals are working without the full support of government agencies or receiving any local financial support needed to make their work successful in the management of wildland fires within the context of the numerous social, political, and environmental issues involved.

The Global Wildland Fire Network is a good example of success and the need to do more. Most areas of the globe are involved in the network. Some networks, North America, for example, have a history of years of cooperation, have formal, signed agreements between the member countries and use the authorities in those agreements to assist with fire suppression, develop and conduct joint training, and hold annual meetings to plan future projects. The North American network membership comes from all sectors involved with wildland fire management; Federal and State governments, private industry, non-profit organizations and groups of citizens, Tribal governments and organization and local governments. Members also have formal and informal arrangements with other agencies and groups outside the North American network.

Other regions are not so fortunate. There are networks in some regions with membership of a few interested and dedicated people but they do not have the support or participation of all of the primary wildland fire agencies in the member countries. While the network is functioning as a forum for information exchange, it is not effective operationally.

Many countries and agencies do not have agreements with their neighbours and do not participate in joint training and exercises.

³ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/RationaleandIntroduction.html>

The agreements from the International Wildland Fire Summit and the Pan American Wildland Fire Conference, as well as the paper prepared for COFO “Needs and Opportunities for International Cooperation in Forest Fire Preparedness” outline the wide range of activities and opportunities. A formal framework or strategy, presented and debated before global bodies such as the COFO and the UN Forum on Forests, tied to the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015 “Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters”⁴, and then taken up by the UN General Assembly is a critical next step if we are to take advantage of the momentum from the past years activities.

4. The Development of an International Wildland Fire Accord

The “Framework for the Development of the International Wildland Fire Accord”⁵, agreed between GFMC and FAO in May 2004 and endorsed in principle by the FAO Regional Forestry Commissions and the Technical Forestry Bodies for the Attention of the Committee on Forestry⁶, provides a roadmap from the first global conferences, the process of building the Global Wildland Fire Network and the consultations of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks in support of the preparation of the ministerial meeting.⁷ The recommendations of the UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network of December 2004 (see ANNEX A) provide a comprehensive list of high-priority action items that need to be addressed by the international community. The Advisory Group / WFNW recommended that the ministers:

- ♦ Consider the recommendations emanating from the regional and global consultations that took place in 2004
- ♦ Support the Framework for the Development of the International Wildland Fire Accord developed by UN-ISDR / FAO / GFMC
- ♦ Consider the recommended action plan concerning a coordinated effort in international cooperation in wildland fire management as a basis for a resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

An International Wildland Fire Accord will:

- ♦ Provide a basis for governments and agencies to develop a domestic program of support.
- ♦ Provide the format and structure for regional cooperation.
- ♦ Provide a climate where agencies, organizations, and individuals can focus on the cooperative efforts using systems and processes already effective throughout the world.
- ♦ Provide formal acknowledgement that the “Strategy for Future Development of International Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management” as agreed by the International Wildland Fire Summit, the Declaration from the Pan American Wildland Fire Conference, the declarations from the other regions, as well as the FAO and ITTO guidelines that outline methods, techniques, and processes are valuable and effective.
- ♦ Provide support for the use of a common, inter-country operable organizational system when agencies and countries agree to request and/or provide assistance during wildland fire emergencies.
- ♦ Provide incentive for greater membership in the Regional Wildland Fire Networks.
- ♦ Tie together the work from a wide range of agencies, organizations, and agencies into a common framework.
- ♦ Develop standards for global wildland fire assessments that would meet the needs of FAO’s Global Forest Resources Assessments, the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol and the mandates of the UN conventions.

⁴ Programme Outcome Document of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, 18-22 January 2005, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan - <http://www.unisdr.org/wcdr/official-doc/intergov-official-docs.htm>

⁵ <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/Global-Wildland-Fire-Framework-01-February-2005.pdf>

⁶ COFO/2005/2: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/009/J3916e.htm>

⁷ More details on the achieved work of the Global Wildland Fire Network in 2004: Special issue of UN-ECE/FAO International Forest Fire News No. 31: http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/iffn/iffn_31/content31.htm

Taking into account that the development of an international wildland fire accord in the long term may need to be pursued in conjunction with or as part of an international convention or agreement on forests or on disaster reduction, the UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group proposes a three-phase procedure in preparation for enhanced efficiency in international coordinated action. The FAO Ministerial Meeting on Forests is encouraged to endorse this approach:

Near-term

- a) Strengthen and support the UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network as well as the interface procedures developed between the UN-OCHA / UNEP Joint an Environment Unit / Environmental Emergency Services and the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC).
- b) Develop standards for global wildland fire assessments that would meet the needs of FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessments, the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol and the mandates of the UN conventions.
- c) Provide support for the use of a common, inter-country operable organizational system when agencies and countries agree to request and/or provide assistance during wildland fire emergencies.
- d) Support an international accord which is non binding both legally and financially on cooperation in wildland fire management.

Mid-term

- a) Develop regional strategies and agreements under the aegis of ISDR and FAO in the context of natural disaster reduction and / or forest protection programmes, including the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol and the mandates of the UN Conventions CCD and CBD, as well as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.
- b) Following the example of the UN General Assembly Resolution A/57/L.60 of 2002 on "Strengthening the effectiveness and coordination of international urban search and rescue assistance", develop a GA resolution on "Strengthening the effectiveness and coordination of international cooperation in wildland fire management". A General Assembly Resolution would be a high-level statement constituting visible political support of the need for internationally concerted action to respond to the wildland fire situation. This could be used as a guide for agencies wishing to form a cooperative for mutual assistance, aid or technology exchange on wildland fire management. It is recognised that it is rare for countries to have the same legal, financial and operating arrangements. Hence, this template could be used as a guideline of areas to consider when developing a cooperative agreement which considers all the relevant areas of interaction. A high-level statement would be seen as an encouragement but non binding way of interacting without any legal or financial obligation.
- c) Entrust the FAO to establish a Wildland Fire Management Programme Facility (WFPP) corresponding to the National Forest Programme Facility⁸.

Long-term

COFO supports the international accord on cooperation in wildland fire management. Those countries which see mutual benefit from entering into more formally arrangements will utilize the Accord as an initial building block towards formalizing their particular arrangements.

⁸ The National Forest Programme Facility (Facility) is a funding mechanism and information unit created in response to recent intergovernmental meetings which recognized the essential role of national forest programmes in addressing forest sector issues. It is governed by a Donor Support Group and a Steering Committee which includes representatives of beneficiary countries, FAO, the World Bank, funding partners, research institutions, non-governmental organizations, foundations and the private sector. The Facility is currently funded by the European Commission, Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, France and Norway and hosted by FAO.

ANNEX A

UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network
First Meeting, GFMC, Freiburg, Germany, 3-4 December 2004

Recommendations of the First Meeting in support of

**The Framework for the Development of the International Wildland Fire Accord
(International Accord on Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management)**

Directed to the FAO and UNFF Ministerial Meetings on Forests
(Rome, March 2005 - New York, May 2005)

and the

UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR)
(Kobe, Japan, 18-22 January 2005)

Introduction

On 3-4 December 2004 the Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR) met at the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), Freiburg, Germany. The objective of the conference was to evaluate the current status of wildland fires globally, to evaluate the consultations of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks held in 2004 and to prepare recommendations to support the Framework for the Development of the International Wildland Fire Accord (International Accord on Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management), directed to the FAO Ministerial Meeting on Forests (Rome, March 2005), the UNFF Ministerial Meeting on Forests (New York, May 2005) and the UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction (Kobe, Japan, 18-22 January 2005).

Rationale

Over the past decade, many regions of the world have witnessed a growing trend of excessive fire application in land-use systems and land-use change, and an increasing occurrence of wildfires of extreme severities. Some of the effects of wildland fires cross borders, for example smoke pollution and its impacts on human health and safety, loss of biodiversity or site degradation at landscape level leading to desertification or flooding. The depletion of terrestrial carbon by fires burning under extreme conditions in some vegetation types, including organic terrain in peatland biomes, is one of the driving agents of disturbance of global biogeochemical cycles, notably the global carbon cycle. This trend is stirring the international community to address the problem collectively and collaboratively. The consultations of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks in 2004 recommended to develop informal partnerships, joint projects and formal agreements between government and non-governmental institutions that are essential to enable nations to develop sustainable fire management capabilities. The Wildland Fire Advisory Group proposes the development of an International Wildland Fire Accord.

An increasing frequency and destructive force of unwanted wildfires worldwide -- including the excessive use of fire in the conversion of forests into other land uses in the tropical countries -- is affecting human lives, health and well-being, economic assets, property, biodiversity, water resources, soil, atmosphere and climate. Agricultural expansion in some parts of the world is resulting in increased vulnerability of ecosystems; likewise urban encroachment in wildlands is resulting in increased vulnerability of human populations to fire, notably at the rural-urban interface.

Conversely, the role of fire in the natural dynamics and maintenance of many ecosystems as well as the need to use prescribed fire in the maintenance of some wildlands, agricultural and pastoral systems is recognized to maintain habitats for biodiversity, and enhance agricultural productivity and pastoral carrying capacity.

The reason for changing fire regimes is due to increase in population pressure in many countries and associated socio-economic conflicts in some rural areas. In other countries the influence of society has altered historic fire cycles leading to a dangerous and difficult build-up of vegetation fuels on our lands.

The effects of climate variability and climate change are producing periods of extreme drought, resulting in an increase in the severity of fires in some boreal, temperate, sub-tropical and tropical ecosystems, in particular in wetlands.

The need is recognized to formally acknowledge the accountabilities which land management agencies must have in control and management of fire on those lands that include a legislative mandate, that fire is a legitimate land management tool, and that combat fire agencies have a supporting role not a lead role.

In recent years, a number of international conferences and fora have highlighted a need for an international strategy and action to manage wildland fire. For example, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD 2002) and the International Wildland Fire Summit (Sydney 2003) recommended the development of a strategy to strengthen international cooperation in wildland fire management. The UNFF Resolution 3/2 called countries to develop forest fire management strategies and in this context, consider regional and international cooperation.

The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR) and its Wildland Fire Advisory Group are working to assist and strengthen the efforts of United Nations bodies, other international organizations, and non-governmental organizations, to reduce the negative impacts of wildland fires. Similarly, the UN-ISDR Global Wildland Fire Network (GWFN), the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) and the FAO are working systematically to increase the intra- and inter-regional cooperation in wildland fire management in the world. Consultations of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks in 2004 revealed that the majority of countries worldwide is ready to establish and strengthen regional and international dialogues on cooperation and exchange of information, research and wildland fire management, including through agreements.

International cooperation is urgently required to share resources in overcoming current gaps and shortages in:

- Consistent information and statistics about fires, their causes and their effects
- Applied research in social sciences and humanities, and innovations in appropriate technology
- Integration of social, economic, environmental considerations and institutions in developing tangible policies and practices related to fire
- Fire becoming an integral component of land, resource, and forest management
- Balanced approaches and solutions, including mitigation, prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery
- Community-based approaches to fire management
- Skills and knowledge of rural people in fire management
- Training in the appropriate use of fire (for example, prescribed burning or the use of fire at the interface of critical risk)
- Long-term visions or plans with tangible short-term and medium-term milestones
- Compatible approaches, e.g., global implementation of the Incident Command System (ICS) and the International Wildland Fire Agreements Template
- Operational satellite-based remote sensing system for the detection, monitoring and impact assessment of wildland fires

Proposed Action – National, Regional and International

Summarizing the outcomes of the international consultations held in accordance with the GFMC-ISDR-FAO “Framework for the Development of the International Wildland Fire Accord” the Wildland Fire Advisory Group recommends to governments, international organizations and non-government organizations, including the academic sector, the following action plan for cooperation on wildland fire management:

- Implement national and regional strategies that recognize the importance of forests in alleviating poverty and increasing food security
- Elevate the priority of sustainable forest management on national political agendas
- Elevate the priority of sustainable forest management on the agendas of development assistance agencies and international organizations

- Develop and implement national laws and policies that promote integrated approaches to agriculture, forest management, fire management, economic development, social and human resources development, and environmental protection
 - Develop long-term strategic approaches to fire, rather than only reacting to emergencies and recognize the beneficial use of fire as an ecosystem and resource management tool
 - Strengthen the capacities of organizations responsible for managing fire in each country
 - Develop and implement national and regional fire research programs
 - Develop an effective communication strategy which delineates that fire is an essential natural process, that land management agencies are committed to a balanced fire programme that will reduce risks on the one hand and realise benefits of fire on the other hand
 - Strengthen formal and informal education programs in forest fire management
 - Establish national centres for monitoring wildland fires
 - Implement community-based policies and approaches to fire management, involving civil society, indigenous communities, farmers and forest workers in fire preparedness, prevention and response, as a fundamental principle to gain local commitment for the protection of ecosystems and integrated fire management, and incorporate them as national policies
 - Implement and consolidate the Incident Command System in countries to strengthen the capabilities of their organizations and to facilitate efficient multilateral cooperation in fire emergencies
 - Build partnerships among federal and state agencies, tribal governments, fire departments, communities and that land owners, and promote public education necessary to the success of fire management programmes
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- Develop and standardize fire statistics that include common criteria for classification of vegetation types affected by fire
 - Recognize the need for applying economic evaluation of environmental damages caused by fires, as well as damages avoided by preventing or suppressing fires, as a planning and management tool
 - Request the European Space Agency and other space agencies to establish a satellite system for operational detection, monitoring and impact assessment of wildland fires
 - Prioritise research on global carbon strategies and the implications of the Kyoto Protocol on wildland fire management
 - In addition to existing funding agencies such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), create national and regional financing mechanisms for fire management, including private mechanisms
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- Support the efforts of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) in formulating appropriate policies to promote sustainable forest management, including on wildland fire management, and to implement these policies through, inter alia, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF)
 - Endorse the ISDR Global Wildland Fire Network and recommend official recognition of Regional Wildland Fire Networks under the auspices of the United Nations ISDR, FAO, and GFMC, among others
 - Instrumentalize the networks as effective platforms for dialogue and communication to achieve a level of mutual cooperation and synergy within regions, between regions, as well as between the Rio conventions UNCCD, UNCBD, and UNFCCC.
 - Support the Regional Wildland Fire Networks and the Secretariat of the Global Wildland Fire Network with appropriate funding to ensure efficient outreach activities and desired political impacts
 - Support agreements on cooperation in integrated fire management between institutions within countries, as well as between countries in each region, and between regions
 - Promote the development of an international accord for cooperation in the prevention and management of wildland fire (for example an International Wildland Fire Accord)

Recommendations to the Ministerial Meetings

Based on this action plan, the Wildland Fire Advisory Group specifically requests the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO), the FAO Ministerial Meeting on Forests and the UNFF Ministerial Segment to

- Consider the recommendations emanating from the regional and global consultations that took place in 2004
- Support the Framework for the Development of the International Wildland Fire Accord developed by UN-ISDR / FAO / GFMC
- Consider the recommended action plan concerning a coordinated effort in international cooperation in wildland fire management as a basis for a resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

ANNEX B

3rd International Wildland Fire Summit Outcomes

Introduction

The drive to hold a Summit came from a widely held concern that more needed to be done to improve cooperation at an international level in the prevention and suppression of wildland fires. The overall goal of the Summit was in line with, and supported by, the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR).

The Summit participants reviewed, and discussed four papers tabled to stimulate ideas, solutions, and strategies to improve communication and coordination between agencies and organizations, and to improve fire management practices for the sustainable use of natural resources and the safeguarding of food security. Adoption of the principles and outcomes provided in the papers will assist organizations attempting to build a coherent response in reducing the negative impacts of wildland fires on humanity and the global environment, while encouraging ecologically and socially beneficial fire use where this is appropriate

Participants

The Summit was for invited participants with a key interest in the outcome. Invitees were selected for their expertise in wildland fire management and their capacity to influence the implementation of the outcomes of the Summit within their own domestic jurisdiction. In all, 92 people accepted the invitation from 34 countries and 12 international organizations.

Summit Outputs

The Summit participants discussed and agreed either in principle or in substance to a series of strategies that will build on the work of many groups, conferences and regional summits: (An agreement in principle means that the participants agree that the strategies have merit and will begin to discuss and/or implement the strategies either within their agency or work with local partners to implement the strategy in the region.)

- An agreement that the **principles** presented in Summit Paper 1 should apply to international wildland fire management projects and exchanges when adapted to local ecological and social conditions.
- An agreement that an **international agreement template** presented in Summit Paper 2 can be used by agencies wishing to form a cooperative or mutual aid arrangements with one or more other countries for mutual assistance in wildland fire management.
- An agreement that an **Incident Command System (ICS)** presented in Summit Paper 3 should become the international standard for all wildland incident management participating in international or interagency agreements and exchanges.
- An agreement to a **strategy for future development** as presented in Summit Paper 4.

Specific Actions by Summit participants:

- Agreement with the concept that a series of regional conferences, summits, or roundtables will be held and lead into the 2nd Global Wildland Fire Summit no later than 2007, and the 4th International Wildland Fire Conference and Exhibition in Spain in 2007.
- Agreement to work individually and collectively to secure resources and funding for hosting the regional sessions and implementing other Summit outputs. The regional summits will be hosted and supported financially by local agencies or organizations. The agenda and themes will be developed locally. The meetings can be held in conjunction with established conferences and meetings.
- Agreement that the Summit outcomes will be transmitted to the following organizations: The United Nations through the International Strategy For Disaster Reduction (ISDR); the

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO).

- Agreement to request the assistance from the UN to lead the implementation of the outcomes of this strategy, including securing funding in support of the establishment of regional networks, conferences, and summits

Editorial note:

For the full coverage of the Summit: See Special Issue of International Forest Fire News (IFFN) No. 29:

http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/iffn/iffn_29/content29.htm