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**International Technical and Scientific Consultation**  
**"Forest Fire Management in the Balkan Region"**  
Ohrid, Macedonia, 4 – 5 April 2005

**Technical Report of the Consultation**

The **International Technical and Scientific Consultation "Forest Fire Management in the Balkan Region"** was held in Ohrid, from the 4 to 5 April 2005, under the auspices of the Global Wildland Fire Network, United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR). The realization of the consultation was supported by Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), Freiburg, Germany, and financed by the German Foreign Office, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance.

There were 18 participants from nine countries: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro and Turkey.

The meeting was opened by Mr. Eng. Zoran Zlatevski, advisor of the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Supply.

A Letter of greetings from FAO was read by Mr. Bojan Rantasa, FAO Project Office, Macedonia.

The Consultation had media coverage by a reporting unit of the Macedonian national television.

The keynote speech and the eight national reports were presented on the first day of the Consultation.

The keynote presentation was presented by Prof. Johann G. Goldammer (GFMC). The title of the presentation was: **The Global Wildland Fire Network, United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR): Challenges for the Regional Balkan Wildland Fire Network.**

During the next sessions, National Wildland Fire Reports of the Balkan countries were presented (Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, Hungary, Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro). In these National Reports, the situation of forest fire management was presented, both the positive developments and the problems that countries encounter in forest fire protection.

The second day of the meeting continued with work in two working groups:

- Research and Development
- Transnational Cooperation in Fire Management

The main issue in these discussions was: Determination of the current problems and recommendations for future collaboration between countries in the Balkan Region.

Chairmen of the first group was Prof. Dr. Ertugrul Bilgili and Prof. Dr. Johann Goldammer of the second group.

After the completion of the working groups discussions and presentation of their conclusions, they brought the final conclusions from the meeting:

## Conclusions

### **The participants of the consultation:**

Recognizing the importance of forests as providers of environmental services and social, economic, and ecological benefits to humankind in Southeast Europe;

Expressing concern about the increasing frequency and destructive force of wildfires in Southeast Europe affecting human health and well-being, economic assets, property, biodiversity, water resources, soil, atmosphere and climate;

Noting that changing land use and rural exodus in some parts of the region is resulting in increased wildfire hazard and vulnerability of ecosystems; likewise urban encroachment in wildlands resulting in increased vulnerability of human populations to fire, notably at the rural-urban interface;

Noting an increase in vulnerability of humans and ecosystems to secondary disasters following fires, including floods, landslides and soil erosion;

Noting that the effects of climate variability and climate change caused by human activities are already producing periods of extreme drought resulting in an increase in the severity of fires in some ecosystems;

Concluding from the analyses and reports of the countries of the Balkan region presented at this consultation, it is evident that the majority of countries in the regions are ready to establish and strengthen a regional dialogue on cooperation and exchange of information, research and wildland fire management; bilateral and multilateral agreements should be considered;

Expressing the intention to overcome **current gaps and shortages** in:

- Consistent information and statistics about fires, their causes and their effects
- Applied research in social sciences and humanities, including finances for research
- Integration of social, economic, environmental considerations and institutions in developing tangible policies and practices related to wildland fire
- Integration of fire as a component of land, resource, and forest management
- Community-based approaches to fire management
- Training in the appropriate use of fire (for example, prescribed burning for fuel reduction and nature conservation)
- Training in the safe and efficient use of resources for fire suppression (for example, appropriate equipment for fire suppression, wildland fire safety)
- Compatible approaches, e.g., global implementation of the Incident Command System (ICS) and the International Wildland Fire Agreements Template

Recalling the recommendations of the International Wildland Fire Summit (Sydney, 2003), the UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network (2004), and the FAO Ministerial Meeting on Forests (2005) with respect to the management of wildland fires and the strategy to strengthen international cooperation in wildland fire management;

Endorsing the efforts of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR) and its Wildland Fire Advisory Group 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;

Supporting the objectives of the ISDR Global Wildland Fire Network (GWFN) and the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) to systematically increase the intra- and inter-regional cooperation in wildland fire management for the world;

Expressing gratitude to the Faculty of Forestry of Skopje, represented by Mr. Nikola Nikolov, for the preparation and organization of the consultation;

Recommend to governments, international organizations and non-government organizations the following action plan for cooperation on wildland fire research and management in Southeast Europe:

## **Research**

- Secure financing of a regional wildland fire research programme
- Strengthening wildland fire research cooperation between neighbouring countries
- Develop standardization of terminology and procedures
- Develop standardized data collection i.a.w. the further development of global wildland fire data collection
- Encourage increased involvement of the science community in wildland fire-related research programmes (interdisciplinary research)
- Support the establishment of national or regional (international) wildland fire research centers
- Establish a regional wildland fire weather network
- Approach the EU Erasmus/Socrates programme for developing a dedicated programme for wildland fire exchange

## **Consolidation of the Regional Network**

- Expand the current focus on the Balkan Region to a “Regional South East European Wildland Fire Network” and invite countries adjoining to the Balkan region to cooperate
- Establish a network of country Focal Points, preferably with one representative of a government agency and a representative of the academia
- Support the network co-coordinators that are representing the main stakeholders involved (Mr. Nikola Nikolov, Macedonia, Research; Mr. Vladimir Konstantinov, Bulgaria, Forest Service; Mr. Dulijano Grum, Croatia, Fire Service) (initially nominated for a 1-year period)
- Seek for widespread membership in the network
- Maintain a publicly accessible website of the network (communication language: English)
- Produce an initial publication of this regional consultation and the network foundation, to be published in UN-ECE/FAO International Forest Fire News, including a summary of previous activities in international cooperation in the SE European Region
- Conduct a first Regional Advanced Wildland Fire Management Training Course not later than 2006, based on experiences in other regions and the FAO courses in Bulgaria; seek support from the German Foreign Office

- Request a FAO Technical Development Project (TCP) on “Development of a Regional SE European Strategy for International Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management”, preferably to be conducted before 2007
- Improve access and reliability of regional and country / ecosystem specific early warning information, including automatic distribution
- Participate at the 4<sup>th</sup> International Wildland Fire Conference, Madrid, Spain (May 2007)
- Convene the next network meeting not later than 2006

During the meeting the participants exchanged experiences and agreed on cooperation in the future. This, along with other issues is one of the more important effects from the Consultation, proving that this type of gatherings and meetings are necessary and useful.

It may not be appropriate for the organizer to give any qualifications about the meeting, but it was the participants opinion (hopefully honest) that the meeting was well organized and that they are all leaving Macedonia richer by new knowledge and experience.

On the end, we are using this opportunity to thank the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), Freiburg-Germany, the German Foreign Office, for the support, and we are hoping that cooperation will carry on in future.



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