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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE TO FIFTH INTERNATIONAL WILDLAND FIRE CONFERENCE
Sun City, South Africa, 10 May 2011

It is a pleasure to send my greetings to the participants in this important conference.

The year 2011 has already seen a number of terrifying wildland fires in Western Australia, in the high mountain ecosystems of Nepal, in Mexico, the United States, Russia and, most recently, in Europe. Other disasters have made clear how vulnerable our cities and communities are and how much more effort is required to reduce our vulnerability.

Wildland fires destabilize ecosystems and the global atmosphere, and have clear implications for human health and security. Unlike other natural hazards, wildland fires are primarily caused by human activities. Measures to prevent them – such as education, awareness-raising and capacity-building -- are well known and within reach. Community-Based Fire Management is particularly important.

The transboundary effects of wildland fires associated with long-range smoke transport and emissions are prompting the international community to strengthen cooperation in fire management. International organizations and civil society groups are working to build capacity, develop advanced technologies and promote sustainable land-use practices.

The UN system is strongly committed to this effort. Our work encompasses many aspects of fire management, including agriculture, forestry, health, science, the environment, emergency response and weather forecasting and monitoring.

We welcome the efforts of fire specialists to build a culture of prevention and to develop a spirit of global cooperation. This conference, held in conjunction with the Third Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva, can galvanize our efforts to reduce risk and vulnerability. I encourage you to identify real solutions that will help communities and nations to better handle the adverse impacts of fires and to build safer, more sustainable societies for all. Please accept my best wishes for a successful conference.