



Call for International Cooperation

13 May 2011

International co-operation and a strengthening of wildland fire science and management skills are key to stemming the escalation of wildland fire, according to an "accord" drawn up by the 5th International Wildfire conference.

The "accord" comes after close to 500 wildfire experts from 61 countries met at Sun City near Johannesburg in South Africa this week for the 5th International Wildfire Conference.

The conference produced the document following mammoth regional discussions in which the delegates pledged to work together in taking steps to control the growing phenomenon of wildfire in their communities and across the world.

In it they appealed to the global community to work together to confront an issue that was affecting all humankind. This was supported by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon who sent a message to the conference appealing for "a global spirit of co-operation".

The conference was also video linked to a special session of the Third Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction which meet concurrently in Geneva.

Johann G. Goldammer, from the Global Fire Monitoring Center and facilitator of the discussions, said he was delighted that delegates had come to the agreement and provided a set of principles that would guide the global wildfire community in coming years.

"We have reached the point where we all acknowledge we have a global crisis and we can work together to find solutions," he said.

In the accord the delegates highlighted the need for the wise use of fire in the sustainable management of natural and cultural ecosystems. They expressed strong concern at the escalation of wildfires, many unprecedented in the modern era. These were having a severe impact on communities, the environment and the world economy, the accord said.

They acknowledged the benefits derived through sharing information and said there was a critical need for research to look at new ways of dealing with emerging issues.

The accord raised areas of concern saying that society had altered the natural environment and fire regimes and consequently humans were becoming vulnerable to wildfire.

It called for an increase of fire management efforts on terrain contaminated by radioactivity, unexploded land mines and chemical deposits. Regions affected by nuclear fallout – Chernobyl (1986) and Fukushima (2011) – were of grave concern for the global wildfire community and needed special focus.

More effort had to be made to secure the long term survival of peat bog/wetland ecosystems that were subjected to drainage and climate-driven desiccation as they would be vulnerable to wildfire.

The accord appealed for increased effort to reduce unnecessary burning on croplands, fallow and other lands to reduce the negative impact of greenhouse gas and black carbon emissions on the regional, arctic and global environment.

Wildfire 2011 ended on Friday, May 13 with the baton being passed to the Korea delegation who will host the 6th International Wildfire Conference in 2015.

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On Behalf of the 5th International Wildfire Conference