



Statement by the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction

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Increasing disaster losses are an indicator of unsustainable development practices

Current development practices are failing to account for and address disaster risk. Economic losses now average of up to USD300 billion a year: A strong indicator of unsustainable development. Resilient and sustainable development works with nature not against nature. For all of you here – with so much experience in fire management on the ground – you know better than most how true important this is.

As your Statement from the 5th Wildland Fire Conference (2011) indicated, there is '*strong concern at the escalation of wildfires across the globe ... with a severe impact on communities, the environment and the world economy.*' You concluded that '*efforts should be strengthened in capacity building in wildland fire science and management and that this can be fostered by international cooperation and sharing of expertise and resources.*'

These observations remain as valid today as they were four years ago. The main themes of this conference – first the protection of global natural and cultural heritage from fire and second moving towards a cohesive global fire management strategy – will build on your past achievements and continue to address the key challenges of fire science and management

Wildland is an important part of 'natural capital': More needs to be done to protect it

A country's 'natural capital', including its wildlands, is an important part of national wealth. A country with a declining base of natural capital is unlikely to be able to achieve a sustainable increase in wealth.

It is true that in some ecosystems wildland fires provide benefits. However, many wildland fires are both a driver and a result of the degradation of natural capital. Wildland fires now affect all continents. The Western USA, Southeast Australia, Indonesia, and Southern Europe are among the many regions that have suffered recently.

Clearly more needs to be done. The Statement from your last Wildland Conference in South Africa four years ago contains many important recommendations that I fully support.

The importance of participation, a more systemized application of technology particularly in early warning systems, stronger awareness and use of key fire management principles, and the need for increased adaptation capacity in an era of global warming are all key elements of a more resilient and sustainable approach for wildland fire management.

Implementing the Sendai Framework will make development gains more resilient to disasters

The Sendai Framework is the first part of the post-2015 development agenda that provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to implement development that is both resilient and sustainable. The Sendai Framework shifts the focus to reducing both disaster risk and disaster losses. In other words, it calls on governments and other actors at the international, regional, national and local level to manage disaster risk rather than only manage disasters.

The Sustainable Development Goals adopted last month in New York aim to 'transform our world'. Disaster risk is a theme that cuts across all of the 17 goals, including Goal 15, which focuses on the sustainable management of ecosystems and forests. The international development agenda is becoming more coherent. This is good news for all of you as policymakers and practitioners including those of you at this conference with a focus on wildland fire management.

Your long-standing approach to international cooperation and partnership is a global example

Both the Sendai Framework and the SDGs emphasize the critical importance of international cooperation and global partnership for sustainable and resilient development.

Your community of fire management policymakers and practitioners stands as a consistent global example of such collaboration in action. Since the First International Wildland Fire Conference in Boston in 1989 your community has remained committed and engaged in strengthening fire science and management.

The continuing health of this diverse community is in clear evidence at this conference with senior representatives present from a variety of sectors such as forestry, climate and meteorology, ecosystem, disaster and security, and human health.

Your concluding Conference Statement will form an important part of the growing and increasingly coherent body of international policy and recommendations in this a key year for resilient and sustainable development. This conference is a timely contribution to the implementation of the Sendai Framework. 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.