



The Forest Fire Emergency in Syria in October 2004

An example for Transnational Cooperation addressing Wildland Fire Emergencies

Press Report: One dead, 22 injured in Syrian forest fires near Turkish border

DAMASCUS, 27 October 2004 (AFP) - At least one person was killed and 22 injured as fierce forest fires swept through a region of northwest Syria near the Turkish border, the state news agency SANA reported Wednesday. It said the fires which broke out late Tuesday north of the Mediterranean port city of Latakia raged on throughout the night but had later been brought under control in certain areas. An elderly man was killed when his home was burnt down in Ras al-Basit, a coastal resort some 400 kilometres (250 miles) northwest of the Syrian capital, said SANA. Twenty-two other people, among them four firefighters, were hospitalised in nearby towns. "Fifteen fires ravaged more than 2,000 hectares (4,900 acres) of forest and orchards," and several homes were destroyed, it said. Residents contacted by telephone said firefighters were still battling the flames Wednesday afternoon in the pine forests of Latakia province. Ras al-Basit and the Kassab mountains were the worst hit. "Drought and unseasonal high temperatures contributed" to the fire, said Syria's local administration and environment minister, Hilal Atrash, quoted by SANA. State radio, meanwhile, said the actual trigger was not yet known but the fires would be brought under control within hours.

According to SANA, firefighters from five northern provinces were mobilised to combat the blazes, which were driven by a fierce northerly wind. Turkey said it gave a helping hand to combat the fires, in a new sign of rapprochement between the two former foes. Acting on a request from Syrian authorities, the Turkish army dispatched three C-130 planes and the forestry ministry sent two helicopters to help douse the blaze, the premier's office in Ankara said. Officials in the Turkish border city of Hatay, meanwhile, sent three fire engines, it said. Turkey and Syria have significantly improved ties since 1998 when they nearly went to war over Ankara's accusations that Damascus was backing Kurdish separatist rebels fighting the Ankara government.

Source: <http://www.turkishpress.com/news.asp?id=31984>



International Forest Fire News (IFFN) is an activity of the FAO/UNECE Team of Specialists on Forest Fire and the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC). IFFN is published on behalf of UNECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission and is serving the UN-ISDR Global Wildland Fire Network (GWFN). For the complete IFFN archive see: <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/iffn/iffn.htm>



The GFMC supplied the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, FAO, Syrian, Turkish and Israeli authorities with near-real time information on the wildfire emergency. The UNEP/OCHA National Focal Point in Syria, Mr. Erfan Ali (Director of Systems & Plans, Ministry of Local Administration & Environment) transmitted photos like these to the GFMC, which put them on the daily updated web page covering the situation, e.g.: http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GFMCnew/2004/1028/20041028_syria.htm