4th International Wildland Fire Conference
Recommendations of Session F

Subsahara Africa
Regional Self-Assessment and Conclusions

I. Self-assessment of the fire situation and fire management capabilities

Global issues impacting on the regions were identified and discussed. They included:

- Demographic changes, widespread poverty
- Land-use change and land management
- Climate change
- Human health, security and peace

1) In all major publications about vegetation fires in Sub-Saharan Africa, the African continent is referred to as the "Fire Continent". Africa sparkles with more routine fire than any other landmass.

2) In Africa, south of the Sahara desert, more vegetation fires burn and in higher frequencies than on any other continent. In the African environment, fire is a natural factor as rain and sun. Approximately 175 million hectares (ha) burn every year, accounting for 37% of the dry matter burned globally.

3) The Joint Research Centre of the European Commission carried out the first global survey of burned areas. This study, based on the detection of fire scars from the SPOT-VEGETATION sensor for 2000, showed that Africa is the most fire-prone continent in the world. 7.7 percent of the continent burned in 2000, which is 64 percent of the global total of just over 3.5 million km^2.

4) In terms of the number of fires, as indexed by the number of fire scars, Africa also leads the world, with 54 percent. For 2004, the MODIS sensors on NASA's Terra and Aqua satellites detected active fires in 2.3 million 1 km^2 pixels, equivalent to 7.8 percent of Africa's land area, a similar extent of burning to that in 2000.

5) However, many Sub Saharan ecosystems require fire in order to sustain ecosystem health and not all fires detected are unwanted fires.

6) Integrated Fire Management approaches in Sub-Saharan Africa are facing an incredible number of difficulties and obstacles. There is a lack of sufficient institutional and organisational capacity in relation to fire management positions according to functions.

7) However, there are very encouraging examples, role models and many motivated people who want to actively change the unacceptable fire situation in their nation, region and on the continent.

8) Wildland fire management in Sub Sahara Africa is often an agricultural and conservation driven theme or affair; thus it becomes important to involve agricultural and conservation sectors to assume their responsibilities in using fires in controlled way. Social and economic factors, including arson, can only be solved through a people centred and participative approach.

II. Conclusions and Recommendations

The participants of the Regional Africa Session during the 4th Wildland Fire Conference 2007 in Seville, Spain:

1) Expressing concern about the impacts of uncontrolled fires and excessive application of fire in land-use systems Sub-Sahara Africa on ecosystem stability, including problems related to biodiversity conservation, sustainability of vegetation, soil and water resources, and other environmental resources

2) Noting that human-induced climate change factors are affecting the severity and destructive capacity of fires in wetlands, peatlands and landscapes infested with invasive alien plants.

3) Noting the increasing vulnerability of human populations in Sub-Sahara Africa to secondary natural disasters, notably flood disasters, landslides and erosion

4) Expressing the intent to jointly overcome the currently existing gaps, deficits and problems, notably concerning the lack or weakness of
   i. National fire management strategies, plans and legislation
   ii. Capacities of human resources trained for basic and advanced wildland fire management
   iii. Participatory fire management arrangements (Community-Based Fire Management in the frame of Community-Based Natural Resources Management)
   iv. Resources for public awareness and education campaigns to reduce unwanted ignitions.
   v. Resources for adequate fire management infrastructures and equipment in most Sub-Saharan countries
   vi. Research capabilities and academic training

5) Recalling the Global Wildland Fire Network and all other concerned organisations in supporting, harmonizing and strengthening efforts by the United Nations agencies and programmes, as well as other international organizations including non-government organizations, to reduce the negative impacts of Wildland fires on the environment, and to support the application of prescribed fire for the benefit of ecosystem stability and sustainability;

6) Endorsing the goal of the regional Sub-Sahara Wildland Fire Network and the Sub-Saharan Africa to promote and strengthen bilateral and multilateral agreements for cooperation in fire management;

7) Recognizing and supporting the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the UN Forum of Forests (UNFF) and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the goals and joint endeavours of the Partnership on Environmental Emergencies (led by the UNEP-OCHA Joint Environment Unit), to protect the global vegetation resources and the global atmosphere from negative influences by vegetation fires, as well as the promotion of knowledge and techniques to utilize the beneficial role of fire in ecosystem management;

8) Recognizing and supporting the objectives of the Regional Sub Saharan Wildland Fire Network and the Southern Africa Fire Network (SAFNet), concerning international cooperation in wildland fire management between the countries members of and adjoining the Sub-Saharan Africa Region;

9) Endorsing the recommendations of the International Wildland Fire Summit (Sydney, 2003) concerning common international standards for fire management and the strategy for strengthening international cooperation in wildland fire management;

10) Supporting the objectives of the ISDR Global Wildland Fire Network and its Secretariat, the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), to systematically enhance the intra- and inter-regional cooperation in wildland fire management throughout the world;

11) Encouraging countries to develop protocols and agreement for mutual assistance in wildland fire disaster management, for example within the Sub-Saharan Africa region with special reference to Article 3 of the Sub-Saharan Africa Protocol on Forestry (dated 3 October 2002), and in close cooperation with the UN-ISDR, FAO, UNEP and OCHA.

Recommend the following to concerned individuals, governments and international organisations:

1. In accord with the desire to see further action on global issues impacting on wildland fire within Sub-Saharan Africa, the Regional Session proposes that the collaborators from Southern, Central, East and West Africa South of the Sahara shall hold a Regional Consultations within the next two years under the auspices of AfriFireNet;

2. To actively support regional fire management cooperation efforts. Namely the use and expansion of existing regional expertise within Sub-Saharan Africa countries;

3. To support common regional standards, namely Standard Operating Procedures and organisational structures in fire management (i.e. ICS) in order to facilitate cross border and Inter agency cooperation;

4. To actively support efforts in fire management capacity building, in order to build operational excellence including the purchase of basic fire management equipment, implementation of fire

fighting and community facilitation training at all levels. (Suggesting the establishment of a Sub-Saharan Africa Wildland Fire Training College as a Centre of Excellence);

5. To confirm that Integrated Fire Management is defined as a series of actions that includes fire awareness activities, fire prevention activities, prescribed burning, resource sharing and co-ordination, fire detection, fire suppression and fire damage rehabilitation at local, provincial and national levels in order to create a sustainable and well balanced environment, reduce unwanted wildfire damage and promote the beneficial use of fire;

6. To actively support the implementation of IFM including the promotion of multi-partner organisational and institutional structures in Sub-Sahara Africa countries;

7. To encourage the incorporation of the FAO Fire Management Voluntary Guidelines in national fire management plans;

8. To integrate poverty reduction and social development efforts into fire management programmes.

9. To link Carbon sequestration initiatives with integrated fire management;

10. To promote and support the regional exchange of information, knowledge management, expertise and resources, including disaster assistance measures, through Bilateral and Multilateral Agreements with governments and the AfriFireNet network;

11. To strengthen and to harmonize the initiatives of the Global Wildland Fire Network, its regional initiative AfriFireNet and the Southern African Fire Network SAFNET;

12. To highlight the need for skill transfer into communities and community participative approaches in order to counter the growing number of unwanted fire ignitions;

N.B.: The words "support", "actively support", "promote and support" and "strengthen" in the above conclusions and recommendations have a clear financial connotation. Active support through funding mechanisms appreciated.

Concerning the global issues impacting the region, the participants of the Regional Session "F" recommend to the 4th International Wildland Fire Conference:

1. That a series of Regional Consultations – tentatively addressing "Global Change and Wildland Fire: Regional Solutions for Fire Management" – be held globally, within the next 1-2 years, to progress the global issues which are impacting on the geographic areas covered in this 4th International Wildland Fire Conference's regional sessions.

2. That the 2nd International Wildland Fire Summit – tentatively addressing "Global Change and Wildland Fire: Fire Management Solutions for Mitigation and Adaptation" – be held within the next 2 to 4 years under the auspices of the UNISDR.