



UNITED NATIONS



## UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network

Coordinator and Secretariat: Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), Freiburg, Germany <sup>1</sup>

### Recommendations for the Development of an International Wildland Fire Accord

#### 1. Introduction

This statement reflects the outcomes of the consultations of the UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group (WFAG) / Global Wildland Fire Network (GWFN) during 2003-2004, in particular the recommendations directed to the FAO and UNFF Ministerial Meetings on Forests (Rome, March 2005 - New York, May 2005) and the UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) (Kobe, Japan, January 2005).<sup>2</sup>

*Statement on the utilized terminology: The UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group (WFAG) / Global Wildland Fire Network (GWFN) and the documents prepared by the FAO for the Ministerial Meeting on Forests and the 17<sup>th</sup> Session of COFO are calling for the development of an "International Wildland Fire Accord". In many circumstances the term "Accord" is used to refer to a formal, approved, and binding instrument. However, the drafters of the declarations of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks and the FAO Regional Forestry Commissions did not intend the Accord to be a formal document, such as a Convention or Agreement, that would require ratification by governments, nor did they intend this to be a binding arrangement under international law. They rather intended that the term "International Wildland Fire Accord" would express a consensus of the international community to coordinate and strengthen international cooperation in wildland fire management.*

In order to clarify that intention, some have suggested changing the term Accord to either "Framework" or "Strategy". It is recognized, however, that these terms may not accurately describe the intended document or the ministerial statement. The final term to be chosen should be agreeable by the international community.

#### 2. Rationale

Over the past decade, many regions of the world have experienced a growing trend of excessive fire application in land-use systems and land-use change, and an increasing occurrence of extremely severe wildfires. Some of the effects of wildland fires are transboundary, for example smoke and water pollution and its impacts on human health and safety, loss of biodiversity or site degradation at a

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/Rationale%20and%20Introduction\\_1.html](http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/Rationale%20and%20Introduction_1.html)



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>

landscape level leading to desertification or flooding. The depletion of terrestrial carbon by fires burning under extreme conditions in some vegetation types, including organic terrain in peatland biomes, is one of the driving agents of disturbance of global biogeochemical cycles, notably the global carbon cycle. This trend is causing the international community to address the problem collectively and collaboratively. The consultations of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks in 2004 recommended the development of informal partnerships, joint projects and formal agreements between government and non-governmental institutions that are essential to enable nations to develop sustainable fire management capabilities. Therefore the Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network proposes the development of an international wildland fire accord.

### **3. Transition From Individual Projects to a Coordinated International Response to the Escalating Global Wildland Fire Problem**

In response to increasing wildland fire problems in recent years governments, non-government organizations and the international community began to address the underlying causes of unwanted wildfires and the lack of understanding of the proper use of natural fires and management fires (prescribed burning). Since the late 1990s projects and programmes conducted at country, regional and international levels began to work cooperatively, aiming at sharing resources in wildland fire management – including mutual support in wildland fire emergencies - and capacity building. Examples include:

- ♦ SE Asia: International donors coordinated their response to the fire and smoke episode during and after the El Niño of 1997-98 (e.g., cooperation between GTZ, USFS/USAID, EU, JICA, CIDA)
- ♦ ASEAN: Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution signed in 2002 and being implemented
- ♦ Exchange of fire fighting personnel and mutual support based on bilateral memoranda of understanding and other agreements between countries, e.g. between the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Mexico and others.
- ♦ Border-crossing wildfire emergency response in the Mediterranean region (Portugal, Morocco, Syria, France, Spain)
- ♦ Recommendation for the development of international standards in wildland fire management and response mechanisms by the UN and the International Wildland Fire Summit
- ♦ Establishment of the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), the ISDR Global Wildland Fire Network which is operating through Regional Wildland Fire Networks, involving government, non-government and academic bodies
- ♦ Agreement on a roadmap toward the development of an international accord for cooperation in wildland fire management (by GFMC, FAO and GOF-C-GOLD)<sup>3</sup>
- ♦ Establishment of the ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group as an advisory body to the UN

With this level of effort and success comes the responsibility of the international community to build and assist those who are attempting to address this issue. While more people, groups and governments are involved than ever before, the majority of the world can benefit from a stronger level of cooperation. Many individuals are working without the full support of government agencies or receiving any local financial support needed to make their work successful in the management of wildland fires within the context of the numerous social, political, and environmental issues involved.

The Global Wildland Fire Network is a good example of success and the need to do more. Most areas of the globe are involved in the network. Some networks, North America, for example, have a history of years of cooperation, have formal, signed agreements between the member countries and use the authorities in those agreements to assist with fire suppression, develop and conduct joint training, and hold annual meetings to plan future projects. The North American network membership comes from all sectors involved with wildland fire management; Federal and State governments, private industry, non-profit organizations and groups of citizens, Tribal governments and organization and local governments. Members also have formal and informal arrangements with other agencies and groups outside the North American network.

Other regions are not so fortunate. There are networks in some regions with membership of a few interested and dedicated people but they do not have the support or participation of all of the primary

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/RationaleandIntroduction.html>

wildland fire agencies in the member countries. While the network is functioning as a forum for information exchange, it is not effective operationally.

Many countries and agencies do not have agreements with their neighbours and do not participate in joint training and exercises.

The agreements from the International Wildland Fire Summit and the Pan American Wildland Fire Conference, as well as the paper prepared for COFO “Needs and Opportunities for International Cooperation in Forest Fire Preparedness” outline the wide range of activities and opportunities. A formal framework or strategy, presented and debated before global bodies such as the COFO and the UN Forum on Forests, tied to the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015 “Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters”<sup>4</sup>, and then taken up by the UN General Assembly is a critical next step if we are to take advantage of the momentum from the past years activities.

#### 4. The Development of an International Wildland Fire Accord

The “Framework for the Development of the International Wildland Fire Accord”<sup>5</sup>, agreed between GFMC and FAO in May 2004 and endorsed in principle by the FAO Regional Forestry Commissions and the Technical Forestry Bodies for the Attention of the Committee on Forestry<sup>6</sup>, provides a roadmap from the first global conferences, the process of building the Global Wildland Fire Network and the consultations of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks in support of the preparation of the ministerial meeting.<sup>7</sup> The recommendations of the UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network of December 2004 (see ANNEX) provide a comprehensive list of high-priority action items that need to be addressed by the international community. The Advisory Group / WFNW recommended that the ministers:

- ♦ Consider the recommendations emanating from the regional and global consultations that took place in 2004
- ♦ Support the Framework for the Development of the International Wildland Fire Accord developed by UN-ISDR / FAO / GFMC
- ♦ Consider the recommended action plan concerning a coordinated effort in international cooperation in wildland fire management as a basis for a resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

An International Wildland Fire Accord will:

- ♦ Provide a basis for governments and agencies to develop a domestic program of support.
- ♦ Provide the format and structure for regional cooperation.
- ♦ Provide a climate where agencies, organizations, and individuals can focus on the cooperative efforts using systems and processes already effective throughout the world.
- ♦ Provide formal acknowledgement that the “Strategy for Future Development of International Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management” as agreed by the International Wildland Fire Summit, the Declaration from the Pan American Wildland Fire Conference, the declarations from the other regions, as well as the FAO and ITTO guidelines that outline methods, techniques, and processes are valuable and effective.
- ♦ Provide support for the use of a common, inter-country operable organizational system when agencies and countries agree to request and/or provide assistance during wildland fire emergencies.
- ♦ Provide incentive for greater membership in the Regional Wildland Fire Networks.
- ♦ Tie together the work from a wide range of agencies, organizations, and agencies into a common framework.

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<sup>4</sup> Programme Outcome Document of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, 18-22 January 2005, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan - <http://www.unisdr.org/wcdr/official-doc/intergov-official-docs.htm>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/GlobalNetworks/Global-Wildland-Fire-Framework-01-February-2005.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> COFO/2005/2: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/009/J3916e.htm>

<sup>7</sup> More details on the achieved work of the Global Wildland Fire Network in 2004: Special issue of UN-ECE/FAO International Forest Fire News No. 31: [http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/iffn/iffn\\_31/content31.htm](http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/iffn/iffn_31/content31.htm)

- ♦ Develop standards for global wildland fire assessments that would meet the needs of FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessments, the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol and the mandates of the UN conventions.

Taking into account that the development of an international wildland fire accord in the long term may need to be pursued in conjunction with or as part of an international convention or agreement on forests or on disaster reduction, the UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group proposes a three-phase procedure in preparation for enhanced efficiency in international coordinated action. The FAO Ministerial Meeting on Forests is encouraged to endorse this approach:

### **Near-term**

a) Strengthen and support the UN-ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network as well as the interface procedures developed between the UN-OCHA / UNEP Joint an Environment Unit / Environmental Emergency Services and the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC).

b) Develop standards for global wildland fire assessments that would meet the needs of FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessments, the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol and the mandates of the UN conventions.

c) Provide support for the use of a common, inter-country operable organizational system when agencies and countries agree to request and/or provide assistance during wildland fire emergencies.

### **Mid-term**

a) Develop regional strategies and agreements under the aegis of ISDR and FAO in the context of natural disaster reduction and / or forest protection programmes, including the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol and the mandates of the UN Conventions CCD and CBD, as well as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

b) Following the example of the UN General Assembly Resolution A/57/L.60 of 2002 on "Strengthening the effectiveness and coordination of international urban search and rescue assistance", develop a GA resolution on "Strengthening the effectiveness and coordination of international cooperation in wildland fire management". A General Assembly Resolution would be a high-level statement constituting visible political support of the need for internationally concerted action to respond to the wildland fire situation.

c) Entrust the FAO to establish a Wildland Fire Management Programme Facility (WFPPF) corresponding to the National Forest Programme Facility<sup>8</sup>.

### **Long-term**

Support the process of development of an international accord on cooperation in wildland fire management.

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<sup>8</sup> The National Forest Programme Facility (Facility) is a funding mechanism and information unit created in response to recent intergovernmental meetings which recognized the essential role of national forest programmes in addressing forest sector issues. It is governed by a Donor Support Group and a Steering Committee which includes representatives of beneficiary countries, FAO, the World Bank, funding partners, research institutions, non-governmental organizations, foundations and the private sector. The Facility is currently funded by the European Commission, Sweden, the Netherlands, Finland, France and Norway and hosted by FAO.