

**Midterm Review Plenary 3:  
Rethinking sustainable development; investing with strategic foresight to  
build resilience  
27 May 2022**

**Written Statement by Mr Krzysztof Zyman, Executive Secretary,  
European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA)  
of the Council of Europe**

Excellencies, Dear Participants,

Thank you for this opportunity to address this gathering on behalf of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement of the Council of Europe (EUR-OPA). Before presenting the contribution of the Agreement to address risk and build resilience, I would like to briefly recall briefly that the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) established in 1987, within the institutional framework of the Council of Europe, in addition to its work at the intergovernmental level promotes scientific cooperation within its Network of Specialised Centres. The Scientific Centres provide a platform for practical co-operation in the field of protection against major natural, technological and biological hazards and strengthening resilience in the face of disasters.

The Global Fire Monitoring Center, based in Freiburg Germany and one of the most active Centres with the EUR-OPA Network, serves as coordinator of the UNDRR Wildland Fire Advisory Group and the Global Wildland Fire Network. In addition, the GFMC is Coordinator of the International Wildfire Preparedness Mechanism (IWPM) and the Eurasia Team of Specialists in Landscape Fire Management, an advisory group to the member States of the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), with a focus on Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. As a member of the UNDRR Science & Technology Partnership serving the implementation of the Sendai

Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the GFMC provides a global portal for wildland fire documentation, information and monitoring.

Globally, wildfires and excessive application of fire in land use and land-use change are an unprecedented and growing threat to communities and to natural, cultural, rural, urban and industrial landscapes. The problem is increasing due to the consequences of social, economic and ecological changes (land-use change, demographic change, ecosystem degradation) and climate change. This is impacting the sustainability of natural and cultural landscapes, including their ecosystem services, human health and security, and the loss of public and private assets, including critical infrastructure. The increasing occurrence and duration of droughts in all continents have resulted in wildfires of high severities, which are difficult and often impossible to control and lead to ecosystem degradation with subsequent secondary damages such as loss of topsoil, floods, erosion or landslides, resulting in the loss of stability, biodiversity and productivity of natural and cultural landscapes.

Current risk governance and institutional arrangements in many countries are inadequate to cope with this growing trend, notably due to the prevailing paradigm of addressing the problem through individual and disconnected services and actions in fire prevention or suppression. Unified and integral planning must reframe, ensure and strengthen societal, environmental and economic resilience to landscape fires by addressing coherent, cohesive and coordinated cross-sectoral approaches in risk governance and ownership, stakeholder dialogue, socio-economic innovation in rural landscapes, favoring nature-based solutions, and strengthening local action towards creating resilient ecosystems and communities.

Systematic application of principles of Integrated Fire Management (IFM), based on the wealth of traditional expertise, advanced fire science and technology development, contributes to sustainable land management, ecosystem stability and productivity, maintenance and increase of terrestrial carbon stocks, and reduction of unnecessary emissions of pollutants that affect human health and contribute to the climate crisis.

Collective international efforts are needed to address impacts of landscape fires that are of transboundary nature and currently affecting – at an unacceptable level – common global assets such as atmosphere and climate, natural and

cultural heritage, and human health and security. Systematic application of principles of Integrated Fire Management, based on the wealth of traditional expertise and advanced fire science, contributes to sustainable land management. The role of IFM as an accountable contribution to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, maintain or increase terrestrial carbon pools in all vegetation types and ensure ecosystem functioning needs to be acknowledged.

To implement IFM there is a demand for capacity building, investments and outreach work at global level. Since traditional and advanced knowledge of IFM principles is available for all vegetation types, the systematic application of IFM, notably community-based fire management approaches, should be promoted by prioritizing exchange of expertise between countries. The development of regional programmes and / or resource centres for capacity building including training in fire management should be supported by countries and international organizations. Bilateral and multilateral legally binding agreements and voluntary exchange instruments are needed.

In addressing these areas of concern and the priority actions to be taken, there is a need to build and strengthen governance in fire management of natural, cultural and urban-industrial landscapes through harmonized and coordinated international cooperation. Three implementation goals are envisioned, which – in brief – will address the assistance of the most vulnerable societies; the advancement of cross-boundary cooperation in fire management by establishment of regional programs and / or establishment or strengthening of regional resource centers; and further developing legal frameworks where desired; enhancing bi- and multi-lateral mechanisms for fire management expertise and resource sharing.

These goals are addressing, among other, the Sustainable Development Goals 13 and 15 and meet the Guiding Principles and Priorities for Action of the Sendai Framework. Furthermore, effective Integrated Fire Management may constitute an accountable contribution to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, maintain or increase terrestrial carbon pools in all vegetation types and ensure ecosystem functioning. Effective Integrated Fire Management will contribute to the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and other international conventions such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands or the Council of Europe's Convention on the Conservation of

European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) or the World Heritage Convention (WHC).

Furthermore, these goals are addressing the intent of the international community to strengthen the interoperability and thus the effectiveness and efficiency of international response to wildfire emergencies. In this regard, the responsibilities of the UN – through the Environmental Emergencies Center of the UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit and related instruments such as the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) and multilateral agreements and mechanisms for Civil Protection in Southeast Asia (ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution), Europe (EU Civil Protection Mechanism – UCPM); Council of Europe’s Major Hazard Agreement EUR-OPA; Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe – OSCE), South America (Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization – ACTO) and the International Rainforest Alliance.

In order to achieve these goals, the Global Fire Monitoring Center, together with partner organizations of the Global Wildland Fire Network, proposes to establish an **“International Landscape Fire Management Framework”**. It would streamline the effectiveness and efficiency of international cooperation towards enhancing governance in landscape fire management at local, national, regional and international level. Our gathering provides an excellent forum to formulate such an instrument. States, intergovernmental organizations and other stakeholders are encouraged supporting the call for an **“International Landscape Fire Management Framework”**. It goes without saying that the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement fully endorses this proposal and I invite you to give it due consideration. By positioning this proposed framework as an international instrument under the Sendai Framework, the precursor work and achievements by the former UNISDR Interagency Task Force would be acknowledged and the cross-sectoral nature of the Sendai Framework utilized to bring the capacities and visions of its supporters to collective and coordinated application towards policy development and practice.