



2018 Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction

03-06 July 2018, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Statement by

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Current and Future Consequences of Fires Affecting the Landscapes of Asia: Call for Regional and Global Action to Reduce the Adverse Impacts of Fire on the Environment and Society

Background and Rationale

The Asian region, which is bearing a high diversity of natural and cultural landscapes between the equatorial tropics and the Northern boreal latitudes, is experiencing rapid environmental and socio-economic changes that are leading to an increasing vulnerability of ecosystems and society to vegetation fires (landscape fires). The delegates of the 6th International Wildland Fire Conference, which was held in Republic of Korea in 2015 under the co-sponsorship of the UNISDR, highlighted the following concerns that are common to the Asian region and globally:¹

- Increasing impacts of climate change on climate variability, weather patterns, fuels and fire behaviour, particularly the lengthening of fire seasons, the size in area burned, and the extremity and frequency of fire occurrences
- Insufficient political commitment and support for fire management and development of fire management policies
- Impacts of smoke on human health and air quality as well as fire-induced professional and civilian injuries and fatalities
- Impacts of fires from land-use change and agricultural/industrial clearing
- Increasing impacts of wildfires at the interface with rural settlements and urban fringes
- Impacts of socio-economic and demographic changes, including consequences of human migration, on fire regimes
- Insufficient fire management capacities – in terms of human, technical and financial resources
- Insufficient use of fire as a positive force to address landscape-level fire fuel build up and bush encroachment



United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction



¹ <http://gfmc.online/iwfc/korea-2015.html>

Challenges in Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and Specific Recommendations

While most participants of the 6th International Wildland Fire Conference held common concerns and goals moving forward, some regions are experiencing unique and critical challenges that should receive special attention. These concerns, which are equally valid for the Asian region and need to be addressed in the frame of implementing the Sendai Framework, include:

- Increasing occurrence of fire in ecologically and especially carbon-rich environments such as in tropical rainforests, peatlands, and in the arctic tundra; development of positive feedback loops leading to accelerated disturbances of the global system is of particular concern
- Instances of frequent fatalities due to fire and also fire-smoke pollution
- Lack of sufficient protective equipment, training, and response capabilities in some regions resulting in unnecessary risks and damages from fire
- Lack of viable alternatives to fire as an agricultural and land-use change tool in some regions

In recognizing the concerns raised by the conference participants the following courses of action were identified:

- Increase the application of existing international fire management and incident preparedness mechanisms
- Utilize existing and further develop interoperability mechanisms, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and protocols, e.g. the voluntary Fire Aviation Guidelines, and the Incident Command System (ICS) for application in bi- and multilateral cross-border responses to wildfire emergencies
- Enhance integrated fire management; promote multi-sectoral communication between related and relevant agencies, regionally and nationally
- Strengthen legal and enforcement mechanisms to combat the illegal application of fire in land use and land-use change
- Integrate fire management into initiatives like the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) and use opportunities offered by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and Green Climate Fund (GCF)
- Strengthen institutional and governmental capacity in fire management
- Develop or make available alternatives for fire as a land-use change tool
- Establish or improve vegetation fire monitoring data collection, analysis and early warning mechanisms
- Develop fire management strategies for protected / sensitive areas and contaminated areas
- Increase efficiency and effectiveness of transboundary cooperation, and preparedness and response mechanisms in fire management
- Establish regional programs and / or resource centers for fire management where none currently exist
- Take measures to reduce fire-induced greenhouse gas emissions
- Develop measures for resilience and adaption in the face of a changing vegetation fire climate, including measures to respond to secondary disasters resulting from fire
- Heighten the international exchange of information and cooperation
- Promote the development and application of more science and technology, with emphasis to strengthen the link between fire management and science
- Focus on prevention over suppression; increase the application of prescribed burning
- Continue to place emphasis on community-based fire management practices by education campaigns and capacity building efforts in participatory fire management at local level to successfully reduce wildfire hazards, and enhance productivity and stability of land and the environment

Looking forward, the conference participants suggested increasing international cooperation and response mechanisms, exchange of information and technical and scientific expertise. Based on inputs from the conference participants through regional and thematic statements, a Conference Statement summarized the concerns, the need for action and an envisaged scenario of implementation (Annex to the Declaration). In summary, and in the collective international interest, the conference appealed to the international community to consider two tiers of response:

- **International policies and concerted action:** Collective international efforts are needed to address impacts of vegetation 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 (IFM), based on the wealth of traditional expertise and advanced fire science, 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 climate change. The COP 21 is encouraged to acknowledge the role and endorse the support 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.
- **Capacitation of nations to address the challenges in fire management:** In order 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, could be promoted by 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 agreements and multilateral voluntary exchange instruments should also be supported.

Progress and Achievements since the Adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030

In following up the recommendations of this last International Wildland Fire Conference, two Regional Fire Management Resource Centers have been established in Central Asia and Southeast Asia:

- In 2015 the *Fire Management Resource Center – Central Asia Region* (FMRC-CAR) was established as a regional branch of the *Global Fire Monitoring Center* (GFMC)², with the financial support of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), based in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.³
- In 2017 the *Regional Fire Management Resource Center – South East Asia* (RFMRC-SEA) was inaugurated as a regional branch of the GFMC, with the financial support of the Government of Germany (through the Federal Ministry for Food and Agriculture), based in Bogor, Indonesia.⁴

In August 2018 the *Regional Central Eurasian Fire Monitoring Center* will be formally opened as the third regional branch of the GFMC in Asia, with the financial support of the Council of Europe through its EUR-OPA Major Hazard Agreement, based in Krasnoyarsk, Russia.⁵

Both operational Regional Centers and the GFMC are working under the auspices of the *UNISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group* (WFAG)⁶ and are engaged in the implementation of the *Sendai*

² <http://gfmc.online/>

³ <http://rcafmc.num.edu.mn/>

⁴ <https://rfmrc-sea.org/> (opening and online: early May 2018)

⁵ The first two regional centers were established for the SE Europe / Caucasus Region in 2010 (<http://www.rfmc.mk/>) and Eastern Europe (<https://hubip.edu.ua/en/reefmc>); in 2017 it was decided to establish a Regional Fire Management Resource Center for South America (<http://gfmc.online/wp-content/uploads/Declaracion-de-Vina-del-Mar-2017-Main-ENG.pdf>)

⁶ <http://gfmc.online/globalnetworks/Rationale-and-Introduction-1.html>

Framework 2015-2030 with regards to support countries of the Asian region by advice for the development of fire management policies, and science and technology transfer to enable nations and international organizations to implement the mandate of the *Global Wildland Fire Network*⁷, which includes to:

- *Reduce the negative impacts of vegetation fires (wildland fires / landscape fires) on the environment and humanity; and*
- *Advance the knowledge and application of the ecologically and environmentally benign role of natural fire in fire-dependent ecosystems, and sustainable application of fire in land-use systems.*

The Regional Centers and the GFMC, which is serving as Coordinator and Secretariat of UNISDR-WFAG and the Global Wildland Fire Network, have noted that the consequences of regional climate change and land-use change throughout the Asian region and globally continue to increase the vulnerability of the natural and cultural landscapes to fire, the occurrence of large wildfires (wildfire disasters) and continuing excessive application of land-use fires. While in many countries there is still a lack of comprehensive landscape fire management policies, capacitated human resources and financial resources to apply the principles of integrated fire management. However, this is why countries are becoming increasingly interested to share expertise and resources in fire management, including cross-border cooperation in fire management.

In November 2013 the *UNECE / FAO Regional Forum on Cross-boundary Cooperation in Fire Management* was convened by the GFMC at United Nations in Geneva and included the attendance and contributions by delegations from the Asian region.⁸ As a key outcome the Forum proposed to set up the International Wildfire Preparedness Mechanism (IWPM).⁹ The IWPM since then is operational and available to broker requests and offers for enhancing the state of preparedness and the overall capabilities of countries in fire management. However, since the IWPM is a voluntary and non-financial instrument, the implementation of the recommendations of the Regional Forum and the subsequent 6th International Wildland Fire Conference are lagging behind the accelerating problems arising from changing fire regimes globally.

Commitments in Achieving the Target E of the Sendai Framework

Target E of the Sendai Framework challenges the countries to develop national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020. Wildfire disaster risk reduction requires the development of policies that envisage the increase of resilience of natural and cultural landscapes to wildfires.

In continuation of the implementation of the Hyogo Framework of Action 2005-2015 the Global Wildland Fire Network is providing advisory support to countries belonging to the Regional Wildland Fire Networks, through the GFMC and the Regional Centers, to develop national fire management policies that address landscape fire management across the sectoral responsibilities of the state agencies and civil society as well.¹⁰

In Asia examples for successfully furthering inter-agency cooperation in fire management include Mongolia and Indonesia. In Mongolia the *National Coordination Committee on Forest and Steppe Fire Protection* (NCCFSFP) is implementing the *Law on Disaster Protection of Mongolia*. In Indonesia the Ministry of Economic Affairs coordinates action required by a number of national policies, notably the *Grand Design* enacted by the President of the Republic. This action is implemented by the Ministry for Environment and Forestry.

⁷ <http://gfmc.online/globalnetworks/globalnet.html>

⁸ <http://gfmc.online/iwpm/background.html>

⁹ <http://gfmc.online/iwpm/index-7.html>

¹⁰ In Asia 4 Regional Wildland Fire Networks in SE Asia (coordinated by Indonesia), South Asia (coordinated by Nepal), Central Asia (coordinated by Mongolia) and NE Asia (coordinated by South Korea) are cooperating under the Pan-Asia Wildland Fire Network – see: <http://gfmc.online/globalnetworks/globalnet.html>

In other countries of the Asian regional similar processes to develop National Fire Management Policies are underway. National Round Tables on Fire Management are important instruments in the portfolio of the GFMC and the Regional Centers to assist the countries.¹¹ These activities will serve reaching Target E of the Sendai Framework by 2020 and beyond.

The Way Ahead

In order to revisit the accomplishments of the international cooperation efforts in enhancing fire management capacities through sharing of expertise and human resources over the last years in the Asian region and globally it is recommended to convene an international forum.

It is proposed that the ***First Global Landscape Fire Forum*** be convened at the United Nations in Geneva either as a side event of the Sixth Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (May 2019), in the context of the activities of the ***UN Partnership for Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction*** (PEDRR), or independently, with the aim – among other and to be further defined – to:

- Review the inputs of the UNISDR Global Wildland Fire Network, the Wildland Fire Advisory Group and the GFMC to the UNISDR Science and Technology Advisory Group (STAG) through thematic and regional participation in the *UNISDR Science and Technology Partnership*
- Review the progress in enhancing fire management capabilities through international exchange
- Define capability and financial gaps and needs for action
- Determine the responsibilities and *modus operandi* of the existing mechanisms for strengthening future exchange and resources sharing in fire management at global level

In essence and conclusion, the Regional Fire Management Resource Centers of Central Asia and South East Asia and the GFMC herewith present this concept at the 2018 AMCDRR and to include, if deemed appropriately and decided by the AMCDRR, to include a brief relevant statement in the AMCDRR Outcome Document – the ***Ulaanbaatar Declaration***. The following wording is proposed:

Expressing the concerns about the increasing vulnerability of the natural, cultural and urban-industrial landscapes to wildfires and excessive fire application in land use and land-use change, and the damages inflicted on the global environment, human health and security in Asia and globally;

Noting that landscape fires and fire-generated emissions are of transboundary, regional and global nature and require collective international response by sharing solutions and expertise in fire management;

*Recommend to organize the ***First Global Landscape Fire Forum*** to review achievements and future needs for enhancing international cross-boundary cooperation in fire management, to be held under the auspices of the UNISDR and its Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network at the United Nations in Geneva, in the frame of the Sixth Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (May 2019), or independently.*

¹¹ See GFMC and RFMRC Tools at: <http://gfmcoonline/iwpm/tools-3.html>