



## MINISTERIAL MEETING ON FORESTS

on

## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

Rome, 14 March 2005

### INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN FOREST FIRE MANAGEMENT

1. Fire is an important land management tool, but careless or criminal use of fire may have catastrophic impacts. Wildfire causes forest degradation and may result in loss of human life, economic devastation, social disruption and environmental deterioration. But the frequency, intensity and extent of damage from wildfire can be reduced through effective fire management, including fire prevention, preparedness and suppression.
2. Countries benefit if they develop the capability to manage forest fires as an integral part of their approach to forest management. In many ecosystems, good forest management practices will help to reduce the extent and severity of unplanned fire. In other ecosystems, managed fire can play a positive role. The key is fire preparedness.
3. Fire does not respect national boundaries, and many countries lack the capability to act alone to manage fire effectively, especially in the case of large fire emergencies. Effective international cooperation is an important component in regional and global strategies to improve the management of fire.
4. The majority of forest fires result from causes *outside* the forest. The sustainable management of forests requires the participation of the local population in landscape level management of wildland fire. Globally more than 350 million ha of forests were burned in 2000 of which 95 percent were caused by human activities. The continued expansion of agriculture and other forms of land conversion activities in developing countries; the increased use of forests for recreational purposes and tourism in both developed and developing countries; and the continued expansion of cities and suburbs in almost all countries, are among the factors that are contributing to the increasing global problem of wildland fire.
5. The extent to which knowledge about effective fire management is shared among countries has in the past been limited. In recent years this has been changing rapidly. The catalyst for this change started with bilateral cooperation between bordering countries. The benefits from sharing knowledge and resources became so apparent that regional cooperation has vastly increased.
6. It is only a matter of time before the benefits that result from international cooperation are extended to the global level. The cornerstone of an effective global fire management strategy will be increased international cooperation among countries.

## **Progress towards strengthened international cooperation on forest fire**

7. Examples of successful bilateral cooperation on forest fire date from the 1960s, first in North America, and subsequently in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa. In a recent study, FAO found over 60 examples of bilateral assistance agreements among countries in different regions. An increasing number of catastrophic fires in most regions of the world in the late 1990s led to a number of multilateral initiatives including:

(i) the establishment of a Working Group on Wildland Fire in 2001 within the Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction under the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). This group evolved into the Global Wildland Fire Network in 2003;

(ii) the launching of regional wildland fire networks, with support from the Global Wildland Fire Network, in the Balkans, the Baltic region, the Mediterranean, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Northeast Asia, Australasia, South America, Central America, the Caribbean, North America, and Subsaharan Africa;

(iii) the development of an action programme to reduce the negative effects of wildland fire on environment and humanity during the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa, 2002;

(iv) the Third International Wildland Fire Conference in Sydney, Australia in October 2003 which identified a range of modalities for international cooperation, such as voluntary agreements, UN General Assembly resolutions, and international conventions. The Conference proposed a number of actions, including:

- enhancing international cooperation in wildland fire management through agreements on common principles and a common global strategy
- requesting assistance from the United Nations and its specialized agencies to lead the implementation of the outcomes of this strategy, including securing funding support for regional networks
- establishing a Global Wildland Fire Network to facilitate regional and global dialogue;

(v) in May 2004, the Global Wildland Fire Network developed a Framework for the Development of the International Wildland Fire Accord; and

(vi) the Pan American Conference on Wildland Fire in October 2004 organized by FAO and the Global Fire Monitoring Center brought together 27 heads of national forestry agencies and adopted a declaration calling for countries to:

- establish bilateral and multilateral agreements on cooperation in integrated fire management.
- develop an international accord for cooperation in the prevention and management of wildland fire.

(vii) the Government of Spain has offered to host the 4<sup>th</sup> International Wildland Fire Conference (IWFC) in May 2007.

### **Options for consideration by the Ministerial Meeting**

8. To promote more effective action at the national level, Ministers may wish to:

- (i) advocate fire management as a key component of integrated forest management;
- (ii) promote awareness that forest management is an effective means of fire prevention;
- (iii) underscore the role of fire as a management tool in both agriculture and forestry;
- (iv) advocate legislation and policies that address fire preparedness;
- (v) monitor and manage information on fire;
- (vi) mobilize partners and resources to form partnerships and networks; and
- (vii) advocate community participation in fire management.

9. To promote more effective international cooperation, Ministers may wish to:

- (i) advocate the development of an international accord for cooperation in the prevention and management of wildland fire;
- (ii) encourage countries to share knowledge and resources in support of fire management;
- (iii) promote common standards and procedures;
- (iv) provide guidance to the Committee on Forestry regarding the appropriate role of FAO in fire management;
- (v) support regional wildland fire networks and accords;
- (vi) support the global wildland fire network; and
- (vii) request FAO, in collaboration with other international partners, to facilitate the development of an international accord for cooperation on forest fire.