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SECRETARIAT OF THE GLOBAL WILDLAND FIRE NETWORK
UNISDR WILDLAND FIRE ADVISORY GROUP
INTERNATIONAL WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS MECHANISM
INTERNATIONAL FIRE AVIATION WORKING GROUP

UNISDR IWPM
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Meeting Global Landscape Fire Challenges: Towards Informed Wildfire Disaster Reduction Policies

Globally wildfires are occurring increasingly that seem to be unprecedented in intensity, size and difficulty – often impossibility – to control. Such severe wildfires do not only occur in countries with limited land and fire management capabilities, but also in countries that have a highly developed and sophisticated fire management resources in place. Between 2015 and 2018 extreme fires affected Central Asia, South America (Chile), Europe (Portugal and Greece). Almost uncontrollable wildfires in Canada and the U.S.A. are testimonies for this trend. In addition, excessive use of fire in land-use change, notably in the tropics, contributes to the degradation of ecosystems. Climate change is impacting many ecosystems and increases their inherent wildfire risk, for instance in desiccating formerly non-flammable ecosystems such as wetlands or thawing permafrost sites. The emissions from land-clearing fires and particularly peatland fires do not only release greenhouse gases. Particles emitted by these fires impact on human health and safety, including premature mortality caused by ultrafine particles.

Another effect of climate change is the disappearance of so-called “fire seasons”, i.e. the historically experienced one- to two-peak dry seasons with a few months of climate conditions favoring the occurrence of wildfires. These seasons are increasingly replaced by all-year round wildfire threats.

In many regions the disappearance of traditional land use, which had involved intensive utilization of vegetation, has resulted in increasing flammability of the natural, cultural and peri-urban / industrial landscapes. At the same time the world's growing population is increasingly occupying the "green space" as a consequence of growing urban fringes and the need to build residential areas, industrial developments and infrastructures. Attempts to overcome this problem by technical means, i.e. high-tech solutions including use of heavy machinery, aerial firefighting resources, decision-making support tools and other technological innovations, do not address the underlying causes of this trend as they correspond to "Grey Infrastructure". The suggested approach to revert to sustainable land-use practices, aims at revitalizing abandoned landscapes and their potential to serve as sustainable source for the production of food and renewable energy and "green jobs" as key elements of a "Green Economy" or "Bio-Economy". Intensively managed landscapes would provide the "Green Infrastructure" as they reduce the wildfire risk and post-wildfire secondary disasters (erosion, landslides, floods, sedimentation).

The UNISDR Global Wildland Fire Network: Major achievements and challenges in implementing the Sendai Framework

In order to assist countries to build landscape fire management capacities the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), which was set up as a contribution to the UN Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) in 1998, chaired Working Group 4 "Wildland Fire" of the UNISDR Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction and launched the Global Wildland Fire Network (GWFN).[1] In 2010 the GFMC began to decentralize by establishing Regional Fire Management Resource Centers in Southeast Europe / Caucasus (2010), Eastern Europe (2013), Central Asia (2015) and Southeast Asia and Central Eurasia between 2017 and 2019, with an additional Center planned for Latin America. These Centers provide science-based advisory services for sustainable landscape fire management and development of relevant policies, create an interface and promotion of the dialogue between governmental institutions and civil society, provide internet-based information portals and training and education at academic, institutional and local communities levels.

Progress in achieving the Target (e): Development of National Fire Management Policies to meet Increasing Wildfire Risk

The major aim of developing national fire management policies is to enable countries to address fire management challenges by following the principles of

- Scholarliness, Multi-disciplinarity and Innovation
- Holisticness, Integration and Inclusion
- Coherence, Cohesiveness and Coordination

among state and civil society actors concerned. It is expected that until 2020 the often multi-years lasting process of establishment of national fire management policies will be initiated in countries at risk.

A Sendai Framework Voluntary Commitment: The International Wildfire Preparedness Mechanism (IWPM)

In order to further accelerate implementation of risk-informed sustainable development the GFMC and the Regional Centers have registered the IWPM as a Sendai Framework Voluntary Commitment (April 2019).[2] The mission of the IWPM, established in 2014, is to support, on request, agencies and countries to build national capacities and resilience to wildfire through the exchange of best practice in landscape fire management.

[1] https://www.unisdr.org/2005/task-force/tf-working-groups4-eng.htm
[2] https://sendaicommitments.unisdr.org/commitments/20190222_001