

International Fire (Wildland Fire, Industrial Fire) and HAZMAT Emergency Assistance in the Frame of INSARAG Europe-Africa

Status Report: 14 May 2001

1. Rationale

Experience has shown that secondary effects of natural and technogenic disasters require additional specialist advice in conjunction with SAR response and other humanitarian aid missions. Recent large fire disasters such as the oil refinery fires after the Izmit (Turkey) earthquake (1999) and the forest fire emergency in Ethiopia (2000) were successfully managed by international intervention using the INSARAG principles. The INSARAG family offers an appropriate structure for future systematic preparation and implementation of international assistance in fire emergencies.

2. Precursor activities and formation of the Europe-Africa INSARAG Fire Group

At a regional INSARAG Europe-Africa meeting in December 1999 (Germany) a first proposal was elaborated to establish an INSARAG Fire Group consisting of three elements:

- * Wildland Fire
- * Hazardous Materials (Hazmat)
- * Industrial Fire

At a meeting at the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) in January 2000, it was agreed that the original mandate of INSARAG which in addition to search and rescue would also cover wider aspects of disaster/emergency response. This could include a variety of natural and human-made disasters, including wildland fires. INSARAG would assist in strengthening the role of UN-OCHA by:

- * Governmental expert advisory support in case of a major emergency
- * Advisory experts to be provided out of the INSARAG family covering many fields of disaster relief

At the 5th INSARAG Regional Europe-Africa Conference (Hammamet, Tunisia, November 2000) the establishment of the *Working Group Fire* was formally decided.

a. Principle

- INSARAG-Fire is a network of specialists providing advice in managing industrial fire, wildland fire and HAZMAT incidents affecting populations and the environment

b. Goals

- Provide protocols, guidance and advice to national Focal Points and the UN-OCHA/UNEP on fire-related topics
- Establish links with national agencies, NGOs, and others
- Provide information for experts in the field

c. Terms of reference

- Implementation of fire and HAZMAT topics into the INSARAG Guidelines as required
- Establishment of a database of human resources, equipment, information sources, evaluation of missions
- Facilitation of continuous exchange of information through the Internet, initially utilizing the OCHA Relief Web and other homepages and networks such as GFMC
- Support the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, Emergency Services Branch, by providing expertise and knowledge of its members

3. Implementation of the INSARAG Fire Concept

Between December 1999 and the Hammamet Regional INSARAG Conference the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) facilitated the work of the provisional Fire Group, including its participation at the *Baltic Exercise for Fire Information and Resources Exchange (BALTEX FIRE 2000, Finland, June 2000)*.

After the 5th INSARAG Regional Europe-Africa Conference the GFMC concentrated its efforts in further strengthening the *Wildland Fire* element of the Fire Group (no further activities have been reported for the *Industrial Fire* and *HAZMAT* elements). The following actions have been taken by the GFMC since then:

3.1 Establishment of Interface Procedures with UNEP/OCHA

In view of recent experiences, in particular the large forest fires in Indonesia (1997-98), the Russian Federation (1998) and Ethiopia (2000), the *Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, Emergency Services Branch*, and the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) recognized the need for improved cooperation in early warning, information dissemination and response to wildland fire emergencies. In February 2001, it was agreed between the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, Emergency Services Branch, and the GFMC to elaborate details for a cooperative agreement. In April 2001, both institutions signed *Interface Procedures* that regulate of communication flows and information sharing between both institutions. The procedures are published on the Website of the GFMC:

"Hotline Assistance through United Nations and the GFMC"

- https://gfmc.online/emergency/un_gfmc.html

3.2 Internet-based Information System

Fire Early Warning and Monitoring

Regular updates on national, regional and global early warning and monitoring of wildland fires are provided by the GFMC at:

- <https://gfmc.online/>

For special requirements in wildland fire emergencies, the GFMC is available to provide or link with special products (depending on information availability through the GFMC network).

Starting in mid-2001 the GFMC is also prepared to exercise the utilization of spaceborne fire intelligence by activating the *Charter on Cooperation to Achieve the Coordinated Use of Space Facilities in the Event of Natural or Technological Disasters*. Germany has agreed to utilize its national focal point to the charter for providing access to fire-related spaceborne information on request by the GFMC.

Database on private and public fire response operators

The GFMC also provides online contact to international wildland fire response operators:

- <https://gfmc.online/emergency/contacts.html>

General information

General information of the INSARAG Fire Group is provided at:

- <https://gfmc.online/emergency/insarag.html>

Furthermore, emergency response operations are invited to utilize the GFMC archive with related information on the fire conditions in more than 70 countries. Most of the country information is found at:

International Forest Fire News (IFFN) Country Notes

- <https://gfmc.online/iffn/country/country.html>

3.3 Partnerships

3.3.1 UN-FAO/ECE/ILO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire

The UN-FAO/ECE/ILO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire is coordinated by the GFMC and provides continuous backstopping to the overall GFMC operations.

- <https://gfmc.online/intro/team.html>

Within the ECE region, the Team Leader is organizing regular combined seminars and fire response cooperation exercises such as the *Baltic Exercise on Fire Information and Resources Exchange – BALTEX FIRE 2000* (Finland 2000).

- <https://gfmc.online/conferences/2000.html>

The next event will be the "Conference on Forest Fires in the Eastern Mediterranean, Balkans and adjoining Regions of the Near East and Central Asia" to be hosted by Turkey in 2002 or 2003 (ex-post note: postponed to 2004):

- https://gfmc.online/course/meeting/meeting/meet2004_05.html

and conducted jointly with a regional exercise on forest fire management entitled “Eastern European, Near East and Central Asian States Exercise on Wildland Fire Information and Resources Exchange – EASTEX FIRE 2002” (or EASTEX FIRE 2003) (ex-post note: postponed to 2005):

- [Programme of EASTEX FIRE 2005](#) (PDF, 185 KB)
- [EASTEX FIRE 2005 Report](#) (PDF, 120 KB)
- [EASTEX FIRE 2005 Photo Gallery](#)

3.3.2 Cooperation with ISDR Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction

In keeping with the work of the Working Group on "Fire and Related Environmental Hazards" established under the IDNDR programme on Early Warning, the presentations and recommendations of the IDNDR Programme Forum 1999, and in accordance with the Framework for the Implementation of the ISDR, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and its associated partner, the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) as well as the UN-FAO/ECE/ILO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire, suggested, in 2000, to create an interagency "Working Group on Wildland Fire" (WGWF).

This proposal was in line with several declarations made in international conferences during the last five years and is intended to bring together both the technical members of the fire community and the authorities concerned with policy and national practices in wildland fire management to realise their common interests of fire risk management and disaster reduction at global scale. The Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction (IATF) at its second meeting on 11 October 2000 agreed to establish the Working Group on Wildland Fire (Working Group 4).

Through the Working Group, it is envisaged to establish interagency and inter-sectoral forum of UN agencies and programmes, mechanisms of information and task sharing in the field of reducing the negative impacts of fire on the environment and humanity. The Working Group will consist of a Core Group (members of the Inter-Agency Task Force) and a Consultative Group. The Consultative Group will consist of resource persons required to provide technical and scientific advice to the Working Group. These resource persons will be representatives of the civil society, including the academia, non-government organizations, and the industry active in relevant fields or potentially to be involved.

The Working Group on Wildland Fire is chaired and coordinated by the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) and is operational since May 2001:

- <https://www.unisdr.org/2005/task-force/tf-working-groups4-eng.htm>

Since both the GFMC and the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, Emergency Services Branch will actively be involved in the group, a link to the INSARAG-Fire component will be ensured.

The links between the Working Group *Wildland Fire* and INSARAG Fire is illustrated in Figure 1 (Appendix).

3.3.4 Cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

An International Expert Meeting on Forest Fire Management, organised by FAO in cooperation with the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO), was held at FAO Headquarters in Rome from 7 to 9 March 2001. The main objective of the meeting was to examine the need and capacity of concerned member countries in predicting, preventing, managing and fighting forest fires and propose an action plan to enhance international cooperation in fire management, including mutual assistance in fire emergencies. The GFMC was co-chair of the meeting and called for cooperation with INSARAG. The Expert Meeting requested FAO, ITTO and collaborating agencies, among other, to “*Participate in the existing initiatives and mechanisms such as the Inter-Agency Task Force Working Group on Wildland Fire of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR); the United Nations International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG); the Joint United Nations OCHA/UNEP Environment Unit, the Global Fire Monitoring Centre (GFMC), and actively support the development of their programmes, and facilitate linkages within the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF)*”.

- Website of the joint meeting: https://gfmc.online/programmes/un/fao/fao_1.html

3.3.3 Cooperation with the European Commission

The GFMC is observing the development of upcoming networks such as the *Global Disaster Information Network (GDIN international)*. *GDIN international* is a concept for reducing the impact of natural and technological disasters through better application of information technology to disaster management.

The *Workshop on Natural and Technological Hazards Research in the European Union: Contribution to a Mediterranean Disaster Information Network (MEDIN)*, held at the European Commission in Brussels in November 2000, elaborated a regional initiative, which is carefully being observed by the GFMC. MEDIN is an initiative to promote the sharing of disaster related information, data, research results, knowledge and expertise with the GDIN-International partners and shareholders.

The GFMC is available to share its expertise with GDIN international and MEDIN

In 2000, the INSARAG-Fire Group/ GFMC contributed to EU-sponsored conferences:

- * *Euromediterranean Wildfires Meeting* (France, October 2000)
- * *Workshop on Natural and Technological Hazards Research in the European Union: Contribution to a Mediterranean Disaster Information Network (MEDIN)* (European Commission, Brussels, November 2000)
- * *International Conference Forest Fires 2001* (Greece, March 2001)

In 2000-2001, the INSARAG-Fire Group / GFMC will contribute to the Workshop of the Committee on Earth Observation Satellites (CEOS), Disaster Management Support Group (DMSG) at the European Commission Offices (Brussels, Belgium, 25-27 June 2001).

4. INSARAG Fire Recommendations to the European Commission / ECHO

The GFMC as a liaison to and coordinator of the INSARAG Fire Group suggests a close cooperation between the INSARAG Fire Group and the above-mentioned cross-sectoral links to other UN and regional ECE / EU activities that are of crucial importance for efficient and economic harmonization of wildfire disaster response procedures.

Furthermore, the Commission could financially support the Global Fire Monitoring Center as a European node and center of excellence for wildland fire management.

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Contact Address of the Wildland Fire element of the INSARAG Europe-Africa Fire Group:

Johann G. Goldammer
Global Fire Monitoring Center
Fire Ecology Research Group, Max Planck Institute for Chemistry
c/o Freiburg University
P.O. Box
D-79085 Freiburg
Germany

Tel: +49-761-808011

Fax: +49-761-808012

<https://gfmc.online/>

Appendix

Fig.1. Draft structure of international fire management working programme between the ISDR and United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) in conjunction with other UN and non-UN programmes.

