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**4th International Wildland Fire Conference
Sevilla, Spain, 13-17 May 2007
Opening Address by John Holmes
UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs**

**(Delivered by Douglas Pattie, Senior Coordinator of the UN/ISDR Platform for the
Promotion of the Early Warning)**

**Wildland Fires – Towards Enhancing International Cooperation to Reduce the Negative
Impacts of Fire on the Environment and Humanity**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I would have very much wished to be with you today as the subject is of crucial importance to our work. Unfortunately, previous commitments have prevented me from attending the 4th International Wildland Fire Conference in person.

It has been almost four years since the 3rd International Wildland Fire Conference and the first International Wildland Fire Summit were held in Sydney in October 2003. The outcomes of the Summit were inspired by the fire situation in Australia, often referred to as the “Fire Continent”.

While it has been recognized that fire has its place in nature and must be managed carefully, there are signs indicating that natural and sustainable anthropogenic fire regimes are changing. Land-use and land-use change, the dependence of growing human populations on the natural environment, as well as the impacts of regional climate change, result in an increasing vulnerability of societies and an increasing risk of wildfires disasters.

Spain is one of the countries, which over the last five years has systematically and successfully called for cooperation in fire management with European countries and neighbours. Mutual assistance between countries in managing large fire disasters became more efficient in the extremely dry fire-prone year of 2003 and thereafter due to the foresight of decision makers of which some of them are participating in this conference.

However, there is not only the need to cooperate in fire disaster response. Fire prevention and preparedness are most effective in reducing the risk of large, less controllable fire disasters. This is why the International Wildland Fire Summit of 2003 endorsed a “Strategy for Future Development of International Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management”.

One of the major implementers of the Strategy was the Global Wildland Fire Network. The Global Wildland Fire Network, which provides an umbrella of 13 Regional Wildland Fire Networks and is one of the most active programmes operating under the auspices of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. The last global fire assessments conducted in 2000 and 2006 were based on inputs of the Regional Wildland Fire Networks. With this information and data the United Nations agencies have obtained a realistic picture of the dimension of fire use, wildfire occurrence and the impacts of fire on planet Earth. This information is enabling the UN system to respond within the scope of the mandates of UN specialized agencies and programmes.

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The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction intends to continue supporting the Global Wildland Fire Network and its Advisory Group. Both bodies are important for the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 “Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters”, which was formulated by the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2005. The development of a Global Wildland Fire Early Warning system within the envisaged multi-hazard Global Early Warning System, proposed by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in 2005, will be an essential improvement. The UNISDR International Early Warning Programme is facilitating the realization of this ambitious endeavour.

This conference is an important milestone for recommending action in view of a possible Global Strategy to Enhance International Cooperation in Wildland Fire Management.

Ladies and gentlemen, I congratulate the Government of Spain and the Regional Government of Andalusia for accepting the challenge of organizing and hosting the 4th International Wildland Fire Conference. The outcomes of this conference will be crucial for the consolidation and functioning of the Global Wildland Fire Network and the effective implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action and the ISDR.

Please allow me also to thank all members of the Global Wildland Fire Network for coming to Sevilla and contributing to this conference. Many of you have taken on the burden of intensive preparatory work and long-distance travel in order to be part of a process, which will contribute to sustainable development and protection of the world’s vegetation resources and to reduce the negative impacts of fire on the environment and humanity.

Ladies and gentlemen, with these words, I wish you every success in your deliberations. Thank you.
