

5th International Wildland Fire Conference - 'Wildfire 2011'
Sun City / Pilanesberg National Park, South Africa, 9-13 May 2011

Conference Statement

Background and Rationale

The 5th International Wildland Fire Conference 'Wildfire 2011' was held in Sun City / Pilanesberg National Park, South Africa, 9-13 May 2011. The conference was held under the auspices of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in conjunction with the Third Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva. The Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, conveyed an opening statement to the 500 delegates from 61 countries. He welcomed the efforts of fire specialists from around the world to develop a spirit of global cooperation in addressing the role of fire in the global environment and its impacts on society. The conference participants elaborated on both the need for the wise use of fire in sustainable management of natural and cultural ecosystems, and on the adverse effects of wildfires at local to global scales. They expressed strong concern at the escalation of wildfires across the globe, many unprecedented in the modern era for the severe impact on communities, the environment and the world economy. The conference participants acknowledged the benefits derived through collaboration in sharing information and researching new ways to tackle emerging issues. The conference participants, including the representatives of Regional Wildland Fire Networks and international thematic networks, concluded that efforts be strengthened in capacity building in wildland fire science and management, and that this can be fostered by international cooperation and sharing of expertise and resources.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are addressing common international concerns and reflect the consensus that priority has to be given to:

Areas of concern

Rural and industrialized societies have altered the natural environment and fire regimes. Vice-versa, humans are becoming increasingly vulnerable to the consequences of wildfires. This is calling for:

- Increase of fire management efforts on terrain contaminated by radioactivity, unexploded ordnance, land mines and chemical deposits, notably in the regions affected by the nuclear fallout of the nuclear power plant failures in Chernobyl (1986) and Fukushima (2011)
- Increase of efforts on securing peat bog / wetland ecosystems that are subjected to drainage and climate-driven desiccation to become affected by fire
- Increase of effort to reduce unnecessary burning on croplands, fallow and other lands to reduce the negative impact of greenhouse gas and black carbon emissions on the regional, arctic and global environment
- Address the increasing vulnerability of society at the wildland-urban interface by wildfires
- Provide necessary awareness and means to protect human health and security from wildland fire smoke pollution

Peoples participation

Experience in the involvement of civil society in fire management through participatory approaches (community-based fire management) to successfully reduce wildfire hazards, and enhance productivity and stability of land and the environment, is calling for:

- Creation of operational environments where community decision-making and implementation balance traditional and contemporary fire management requirements
- Management of fire on its benefits, through controlled burning, to improve livelihoods and health of local populations, and reduce greenhouse gases over vast areas of the globe
- Promotion of establishment of volunteer groups to assist state authorities in rural fire management
- Convention of an international conference on community-based fire management

Common international principles

Considerable success has been made in applying advanced principles in fire management and promoting fire management tools adapted to local conditions. The need for widespread application of these principles in practice is calling for:

- Application of the Voluntary Guidelines for Fire Management (FAO, ITTO, WHO/UNEP)
- Translation of the International Wildland Fire Management Terminology to other languages
- Global adoption of the Incident Command System (ICS) for the management of incidents
- Integration of forest fire management principles and tools in the REDD+ scheme
- Application of the ISO Risk Management Standard
- Acknowledgement that fire management is a fundamental element for consideration in all policy, legislation and practices related to land management planning and objectives

Common international tools

Successful development of advanced technologies for wildland fire science and management, notably Satellite Earth Observation products, meteorological observations and forecasting, and climate modeling, is calling for systematic application in support to fire management:

- Development of fire weather and early warning systems at local to global levels
- Capacity Building in the use of fire satellite products
- Design and implementation of a global fire assessment (including fire regime assessment) and establishment of a constantly updated long term satellite fire record which is consistent, validated and endorsed by the Satellite Earth Observation community
- Support national reporting of area burned and emissions
- Support the establishment of regional fire monitoring centers

International cooperation

Experience of a number of successful bilateral and multilateral agreements on cooperation in fire management is calling for:

- Promotion of bilateral and multilateral / regional agreements on cooperation in wildland fire management and mutual assistance in wildland fire emergencies
- Development of a proposal for a Global Agreement on Transboundary Cooperation in Fire Management
- Further involvement of the six FAO Regional Forestry Commissions and the National Platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction in the implementation of principles as laid down in the fire management guidelines and the "Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters"

Efficiency of sharing ground and aerial fire management resources

Mutual assistance on suppression operations demands protocols to dispatch ground and aerial resources and to set operational procedures based on technical criteria, standardization and harmonization of terminology, and training and certification of human resources. This is calling for:

- Country support the International Fire Aviation Working Group's project to identify appropriate standards and best-management practices on which to base the development of voluntary guidelines.

Development of policies addressing global change and fire

In response to global change (interaction of climate change, socio-economic changes, and land-use change) and taking into account that global warming is a reality and will lead to an increasing occurrence and severity of wildland fires globally, and increasing impacts of society. Thus the following is recommended:

- Development of adaptive fire policies and strategies for mitigation, adaptation and protection at national to international levels
- Integration of fire management in the frame of natural resources / land management at landscape level, including use of plant biomass as a renewable and sustainable source for energy production for wildfire hazard reduction
- Support of countries to conduct fire management assessments, formulate legal frameworks and strategies, build sustainable fire management capabilities and institutions, develop fire management plans and human resources

Follow-up International Wildland Fire Conferences

In following up the 5th International Wildland Fire Conference, considering also the outcomes of the International Wildland Fire Summit (2003), it is recommended:

- That the regions organize Consultations, bringing together the operational fire experts and fire scientists be held globally, within the next 1-2 years, to further examine the fire issues resulting from population change and global warming
- That the 2nd International Wildland Fire "Summit" of operational fire experts and scientist, be held within the next 2 to 4 years under the auspices of the United Nations, with a view to developing recommendations for the United Nations, to address the global issues raised during this Conference's Regional Sessions
- That future wildland fire conferences consider expanding their audience beyond the fire management community

The conference participants thanked the organizers and hosts of the conference for bringing together the international community responsible for wildland fire science and management. The participants welcomed the offer of South Korea to host the 6th International Wildland Fire Conference in 2015.