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منظمة الأغذية  
والزراعة  
للأمم المتحدة

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Organización  
de las  
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Unidas  
para la  
Agricultura  
y la  
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**AFRICAN FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION  
SIXTEENTH SESSION**

**NEAR EAST FORESTRY COMMISSION  
EIGHTEENTH SESSION**

**18 – 21 February 2008**

**KHARTOUM, REPUBLIC OF THE SUDAN**

**FORESTS AND WILDFIRES**

**STATUS OF WILDFIRES IN THE REGION**

**Africa**

1. The first Global Burned Area survey showed that Africa is the most fire-prone continent in the world. An estimated 230 million ha (Mha) or eight percent of the continent burned in 2000, which is 64 percent of the global total of just over 350 Mha. Burning was most extensive in Eastern Africa (87 Mha or 15 percent of the area), Central Africa (54 Mha, 14 percent) and Southern Africa (68 Mha, 12 percent).

2. In terms of the number of fires Africa also leads the world, with 54 percent. The current estimate of the quantity of biomass burned globally each year from all sources is about 9,200 million metric tonnes (million mt). Overall, global wildfires consume 5,130 million mt, 42 percent of which is burned in Africa (including fires associated with deforestation). These fires in Africa release about 3,431 million mt of CO<sup>2</sup>, as well as significant quantities of other emissions (Table 1).

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Table 1. Emissions (in million metric tonnes) into the atmosphere from African forest and savannah fires, compared with global figures (data from Andreae, 1997, 2004 with modification).

	African savannah	African forest	African total	Global wildfires	<i>African fires as % of Global</i>
Biomass burned	2000	130	2130	5130	41.5
Carbon dioxide	3226	205	3431	8201	41.8
Carbon monoxide	130	14	144	413	34.9
Methane	4.6	0.9	5.5	19.4	28.4
Nitrogen oxides	7.8	0.2	8.0	16.3	49.1
Total particulate matter	16.6	0.8	17.4	48.8	35.7

3. Fires often spread over large areas as a result of high plant productivity, relatively low rural population densities and rugged landscapes that are not fragmented by settlements, agricultural lands or roads.

4. A regional assessment of fires in Sub Saharan Africa, a supplement to the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) 2005, concluded that the key to effective fire management is to involve agriculture practitioners in using fires in a controlled way. In general terms an integrated approach that includes all relevant sectors is needed.

### **Near East and North Africa**

5. Reports from countries in the Near East and North Africa show increases in fire frequency and severity, thus affecting tree growth and survival, yield and quality of wood and non-wood forest products, wildlife habitat and the recreational, scenic and cultural values of forests. Serious fires also cause human injuries and death in addition to loss of property.

6. An example is described from Lebanon, where on 3 October 2007, more than 300 fires were declared in less than 24 hours, destroying thousands of hectares of forests and other wooded lands. In the following weeks, hundreds of fires were reported. Fortunately the rainy season put an end to this massive destruction. The causes were likely of human origin, amplified by the climatic conditions and the strong winds. Jordan and Cyprus provided notable assistance in fire suppression. Algeria is another country which experienced dramatic fires during the past two years.

7. Many countries in the region lack policy measures and institutional capacity to manage fires effectively, including monitoring, early warning, preparedness, prevention, suppression and restoration. Engagement of local communities in fire management is essential.

8. Informal cooperation is taking place between some countries (Cyprus and Lebanon for example), and the NEFC Task Force has encouraged them to formalize regional cooperation both in terms of prevention and suppression as well as capacity building.

## FAO SUPPORT

9. FAO supports fire management projects in Cape Verde and Botswana, Morocco and Syria and a Technical Cooperation Project for Zimbabwe is under development. In Benin, a participatory diagnosis on causes and consequences of wildfires is taking place, which should lead to a project on fire prevention and controlled burning. All projects have a strong emphasis on Community Based Fire Management (CBFiM), which is recognized as an important element of national fire management strategies and projects.
10. A methodology has been developed to define regional and national action plans and or project proposals. This methodology has been tested and the first results seem promising for its use also in Africa and the Near East.
11. In 2004, FAO and the Global Wildland Fire Network organized a regional Community Based Fire Management training course in Nelspruit, South Africa.
12. At the request of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), FAO helped to develop a SADC fire management project proposal, including a subregional network on fire management. Discussions are on going to establish a similar sub-regional network in West Africa.
13. As requested by the Committee on Forestry (COFO), FAO coordinated the development of the Global Strategy to Enhance International Cooperation in Fire Management ([www.fao.org/forestry/site/firemanagementstrategy](http://www.fao.org/forestry/site/firemanagementstrategy)), including the Voluntary Guidelines for Fire Management ([www.fao.org/docrep/009/j9255e/j9255e00.htm](http://www.fao.org/docrep/009/j9255e/j9255e00.htm)). The guidelines contain principles and strategic actions from prevention to preparedness, suppression and restoration. They emphasize a participatory, community based approach in fire management, as well as the involvement of all relevant agencies and organizations from policy development to implementation.
14. To support the implementation of the guidelines, a Fire Management Actions Alliance ([www.fao.org/forestry/site/firealliance](http://www.fao.org/forestry/site/firealliance)) was launched at the 4<sup>th</sup> International Wildland Fire Conference (Seville, Spain, May 2007). Of the 40 founding members, only two are from the Near East and Sub Saharan Africa. ([www.fao.org/forestry/fire](http://www.fao.org/forestry/fire)).

## DISCUSSION ITEMS FOR THE COMMISSIONS

15. AFWC and NEFC members are invited to consider the following discussion points and potential recommendations that may be relevant in their countries and regions:
  - establish, under the auspices of the Regional Forestry Commissions and in collaboration with partners, subregional networks on fire management to facilitate cooperation among countries involved, to help implementation of the voluntary guidelines; and to support the development of national and regional fire management plans that should determine the needs for capacity building, exchange of information, early warning systems, pilot projects and training courses;
  - more specifically, and as recommended by COFO, NEFC is invited to set up the Near East Fire Management Network to guide regional cooperation, with its first meeting to be organized by the end of 2008, in collaboration with the *Silva Mediterranea* working group on fire management;
  - take further steps in implementing the Community Based Fire Management concept; this activity could be supported by regional workshops organized by FAO and partners;

- encourage bilateral and sub-regional cooperation agreements on combating fires;
- encourage more organizations, agencies or groups from the regions to join in the Fire Management Actions Alliance.