

6th International Wildland Fire Conference

Regional Session IV: Regional Mediterranean and Near East Wildland Fire Networks

Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea, 13 October 2015

SESSION REPORT

The Mediterranean and Near East Wildland Fire Networks met in order to share and discuss some of the relevant initiatives taken place in the Region and with the aim of identifying those key points in which as a network we can move forward and improve the wildfire situation within the countries and beyond state boundaries.

At the meeting there were representatives of five countries (Israel, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain). Despite this and since last Wildfire Conference, many international activities have been developed within the Region in many countries (Israel, Turkey, Croatia, Greece, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal and Algeria, among others). In addition, many meetings and actions were developed under the European Commission umbrella (European Forest Fire Information System and European Civil Protection Mechanism), the UNISDR coordinated by the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

An overview of the Regional Statement was presented as one of the main topics of the discussion at the session. Several regional experts showed their initiatives regarding wildfires. Representatives from Italy, speaking on behalf of Lebanon on a project in which both countries were involved; from Greece, highlighting how to deal with wildfires in economic crisis situation, and from Spain, showing how important is to know about fire history in order to plan and manage in the present and future, shared their expertise.

Regional Statement Discussion

Several key factors identified in the Regional Statement were presented and discussed in order to take them into consideration to encourage a stronger regional management of wildfires. Socio-economic, environmental, scientific and political factors were agreed as the major areas of concern.

A special mention was given to international cooperation enhancement as it plays an important role in strengthening the networks. When countries are facing difficult situations with several and complicated large fires, the Mediterranean wildland fire community can provide the support needed. But there is a need to improve exchange mechanisms and to develop standard protocols and procedures among countries. Bilateral and multilateral agreements are strongly recommended to be put in place. Capacity building is also built on the basis of experts and expertise exchanges, before the disasters, as preparedness mechanisms, and when disasters occur as well.

On the other hand, special references were made to those countries affected, both directly and indirectly, by armed conflicts. These situations should be addressed with specific approaches developed by the international community with diplomatic efforts. Use of arson as a terrorism tool should also be considered as a major threat in this respect.

Some of the participants highlighted the following aspects:

- Prevention investments have been reduced much more over the last years than suppression budgets, which in many countries have not suffered any cuts at all. This wrong tendency needs to be corrected.
- Wildfires are clearly a social problem in the Mediterranean, where most of wildfires are caused by human activities. However, social work lines such as education and awareness campaigns addressed to specific groups of population are not as important as they should be.

- Wildland urban and rural interfaces are under many different regulations. There is a need of an integrated and compatible legislation approach.
- Research and operational management need to better communicate. There are many research projects going on but there is no database where results and synergies could be consulted.
- Initial attack is decisive for successful suppression of wildfires. The developments of early warning systems and effective first response modules have to be taken into consideration.
- Countries which had suffered armed conflicts in the past should be considered as well as those suffering conflicts currently. Post-war fire management issues are a great challenge too.

Conclusions

The meeting ended with the ratification of the Mediterranean as a high wildfire-prone region, which needs more integrated efforts from countries, stakeholders and international organizations. Population involvement and preventive approaches are identified as transversal key work lines to address wildfire management in our region.

Funding support is needed, in order to generate the exchange of knowledge and experience arena in which all member countries could participate, taking into consideration the economic situation of many countries, mainly those in the southern Mediterranean.

Other Mediterranean regions in the world should be considered to be involved in this regional network, such as California, Chile or Australia.

Real and effective network coordination of the region between two countries, one from East Mediterranean and one from West Mediterranean would certainly help improve dynamism and collaboration within the region.