

28th SESSION OF THE FAO COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY – COFO 28



Rome, 28 September to 2 October 2026

Declaration of the Africa Regional Group (ARG)

under Item 6 of the agenda: Integrated fire management and vegetation fires.

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Mr Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

1. Algeria, Kenya, Guinea, Burundi and Mozambique have the honour to present this declaration on behalf of the Africa Regional Group (ARG) and to thank FAO for the attention given, in the framework of this session, to the question of forest fires and integrated fire management.
2. The Africa Group stresses that vegetation fires and forest fires are not solely an environmental question. They directly affect the livelihoods of rural populations, agriculture, biodiversity, water resources, food security and the economic and social development of our countries. In the face of climate change that increases the frequency and intensity of extreme fires, integrated fire management must go beyond emergency response and integrate prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

THE THREE MAIN POINTS OF THE DECLARATION

Diversity of national realities · Priorities of the Africa Group · A common path

First, the diversity of African realities

3. For African countries, the question of fires must be addressed by taking into account the great diversity of our ecosystems and of our socio-economic realities. North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, tropical zones, savannah regions and arid zones do not face the same types of fires or the same risk factors. Our responses must therefore be adapted to the ecological, economic and social realities of each country, while at the same time strengthening cooperation between countries.
4. Two realities illustrate this. In the forest and Mediterranean regions of the continent, heatwaves and periods of drought make the spread of fires particularly rapid and interventions difficult. This shows the importance of simultaneously strengthening prevention, surveillance, early warning, response capacities and the restoration of affected areas, as well as awareness-raising among local populations.
5. In savannah, pastoral rangeland and mountain areas, drought and pressure on water resources exacerbate the vulnerability of communities. These situations demonstrate the value of community-based surveillance, early warning and the link between fire management, wildlife conservation and the livelihoods of herders and farmers.

Mr Chairperson,

Second, the priorities of the Africa Regional Group

6. The Africa Group puts forward four priorities, which are in line with FAO's orientations.

7. Strengthening prevention, by gradually moving from an approach centred on reacting to fires to an approach focused on prevention and risk reduction. FAO encourages precisely this shift through integrated fire management and the “5Rs” approach: review and analysis, risk reduction, readiness, response and recovery.
8. Strengthening national capacities, by giving our forest services and fire-fighting structures greater access to equipment, technologies, data and training, in particular for forest surveillance, early warning systems, risk mapping, satellite data and the training of response teams.
9. Strengthening regional and cross-border cooperation, because fires know no administrative borders. Sharing data, experience, equipment and response capacities between neighbouring countries is a necessity. The regional forestry commissions that support the work of COFO must be fully mobilised to this end.
10. Strengthening access to finance and the role of communities. Prevention requires long-term investment: rebuilding after a disaster is more costly than reducing risks upstream. And the fight against fires cannot be the sole responsibility of forest administrations; it must mobilise local authorities, farmers, community organisations, young people, women and researchers, drawing on local knowledge.

Mr Chairperson,

Third, a common path for Africa

11. The Africa Group welcomes FAO's efforts to strengthen integrated fire management at global level. The Global Fire Management Hub is an important platform for national capacities and the exchange of experience, and the recent guide on assessing the governance of integrated fire management marks a move towards a more comprehensive approach. These tools must be widely accessible to developing countries and accompanied by concrete capacity-building.
12. We must also recognise that fire is part of certain ecosystems and can, in certain contexts, be used traditionally or in a controlled manner. The challenge is to distinguish appropriate practices from uncontrolled and destructive fires. This understanding lies at the heart of the integrated approach advocated by FAO.
13. Protecting Africa's forest resources means protecting biodiversity, the livelihoods of millions of people, food security, soils and water resources, and strengthening the resilience of our territories in the face of climate change. The fight against forest fires must therefore be regarded as an essential component of our sustainable development policies.
14. At this COFO 28, we call on FAO, Member States, technical and financial partners and regional organisations to pursue their efforts together in order to build an Africa that is better prepared, better equipped and more resilient to forest fires. We reaffirm our readiness to strengthen, within the framework of COFO and FAO's regional mechanisms, African cooperation on prevention and integrated fire management.

Thank you.