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**NEAR EAST FORESTRY AND RANGE COMMISSION****TWENTY-FIRST SESSION****THIRD NEAR EAST FORESTRY WEEK****Amman, Jordan, 26 - 30 January 2014****SHAPING THE FAO FIRE MANAGEMENT UMBRELLA PROGRAMME,  
MANAGING WILDFIRE-RELATED RISKS AT THE LANDSCAPE LEVEL,  
AND IMPROVING INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION****Secretariat Note***Summary*

- The FAO fire management programme reflects an integrated approach which deals with vegetation fires throughout all land uses. This note gives an overview of relevant developments and actions taken by FAO and its partners in implementing previous governing body decisions.

**I. FOLLOW-UP TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE 20<sup>th</sup> SESSION  
OF THE NEAR EAST FORESTRY AND RANGE COMMISSION  
(NEFRC) AND OTHER ACTIVITIES IN THE REGION RELATED TO  
THE FAO FIRE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME**

1. At its last session, the Commission expressed appreciation for FAO support on the issue of wildfires and requested that his support continues. Although budget and human resources for fire management have decreased since the last session this paper describes how FAO still is implementing a considerable programme in this field.
2. During the last session, the Commission also requested FAO to investigate indirect and transboundary effects of forest fires. FAO has not received a specific request from a country in the region related to this and lacked the resources to explore this further.
3. The Commission emphasized that it was important to develop early warning programmes and emergency centres in Near east countries, support countries to strengthen local infrastructures and improve technical equipment; as well as to develop fire management models involving local communities, tailored to suit conditions in each country. The new FAO “Smart Fire” Umbrella Programme and several ongoing watershed management, forestry and REDD projects or proposals reflect both landscape as well as community based approaches.

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4. In relation to paragraph 4 the following projects in the region merit attention:
- Since the last session a fire management project in Syria has been concluded.
  - A FAO project in and funded by Morocco on the implementation of forest policy is developing early warning systems for the fire prone regions of the country.
  - At the request of Algeria, FAO has started the preparation to develop a project proposal on fire management, including early warning system.
  - With support from GIZ (Germany), the Joint Research Centre of the EU in Ispra, Silva Mediterranea and FAO, three countries in Northern Africa (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria) and one in the Near East (Lebanon) are being included in the European Forest Fire Information System. This includes training on investigation of fire causes and developing national fire data bases. A better understanding of fire causes and history should at the end lead to better prevention.
  - A regional project funded by the French Global Environmental Facility with a component focuses on REDD+ issues in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia focuses on the importance of fire prevention measures on climate change mitigation particularly in Algeria, where every year 50,000- 80,000 ha are burning during the summer period.
5. The secretariat pointed out that the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO) had described forest fires as a major source of greenhouse gases (GHGs) and called upon countries to include forest fire management in their programmes for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD). The “Smart Fire” Umbrella Programme: Managing Landscapes and Fires in a Changing Climate has one pillar related to emerging issues like climate change. In implementing this pillar, FAO has started a project in Kalimantan, Indonesia, funded through REDD funds from Norway to reduce GHG emission by substituting fire with other methods in agriculture and nearby peatlands and by preventing wildfires in the community owned rubber plantations. More focus on alternatives for using fire was a recommendation also of the last International Wildland Fire Conference. The Smart Fire Umbrella Programme also includes one component on fire management and climate change. The recently published *Climate change guidelines for forest managers (FAO Forestry Paper 172)* includes recommended adaptation actions and mitigation strategies for forest managers related to expected increase in the number, frequency, size or severity of wildfires.

## **II. FOLLOW-UP TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 21<sup>st</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY AND OF OTHER REGIONAL FORESTRY COMMISSIONS**

6. The Committee requested FAO to strengthen the FAO fire management programme by actively seeking financial support for the Multi-Donor Trust Fund proposal. The proposal has now been endorsed by FAO as the “Smart Fire” Umbrella Programme: Managing Landscapes and Fires in a Changing Climate. This Programme will be included under the new FAO Strategic objective 5 (SO5): Increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises. As such, it will be part of the efforts of both the Forestry Department and of the Strategic Objective core team to search for funding.
7. Since the last COFO session, fire-related projects were concluded in The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Project activities in Tanzania on fire management have finished and final reports are being prepared. Projects on integrated fire management or with a component on fire management have started or are ongoing in Chile, Indonesia, Morocco, and Swaziland.
8. Community Based Fire Management (CBFiM) is an important component of the project in Indonesia, and it will be part of the watershed management regional project in the Futa Djallon (West Africa) as well as a Community Based Forest Management project for The Gambia (both to be funded by GEF-5) and a Forest management project for Zimbabwe, in the process of obtaining funding by the European Union.

9. The new GEF-6 cycle which will start in June 2014 has included Disaster Risk Reduction and Fire Management as areas of work. Preparatory work has started to come up with good proposals by then and FAO is planning to initiate discussions with potentially interested countries and regions. In order to strengthen the programme more intensive contacts with donor countries are foreseen as well during this year.

10. The Committee also requested FAO to propose a coordination mechanism between the different UN agencies and programmes working on topics related to fire management, by making full use of its comparative advantages and avoiding duplication with the work of other agencies such as the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) and the Global Fire Monitoring Centre (GFMC). In implementing this decision, discussions have started with UNISDR on this issue and more progress and tangible results are expected in the next year.

11. Finally, the Committee requested FAO to develop, in partnership with other relevant institutions and based on the Fire Management Voluntary Guidelines, a set of international guidance tools for managing wildfire-related risks at the landscape level, including transboundary fire issues. Taking into account other ongoing activities, two initial themes were selected to implement this decision. One is the development of Community Based Fire Management Guidelines for District Officers and NGOs. An initial meeting took place with global experts in late 2012 to define the outline and focus of such a tool. The guidelines are planned to be ready and launched at the International Wildland Fire Conference in 2015 in the Republic of Korea. The guidelines will be based on successful field experiences and be prepared with support from experts from all regions of the world who will also contribute to its review process. The second theme, climate change and fire management, was included in the recently published *Climate change guidelines for forest managers (FAO Forestry Paper 172)*, see paragraph 6. However, more specific guidelines may be needed in the future.

12. The Latin American and Caribbean Forestry Commission session in 2011 requested FAO to update regional statistics on wildfires. The next Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015 will include trends of fire incidence and areas burned over the last 12 years for the first time using satellite data. This analysis will provide information on the total area burned and on forest area burned. Data will be made available to countries for revision as part of the FRA 2015 reporting process.

### III. OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

13. At the FAO-headquarters level, human resources related to fire management are now assigned in a considerable extent to the development of the new FAO Strategic Objective 5: Increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises. Although on the short run it limits efforts to the ongoing Fire Management programme, it will help, at the long and medium term, both the programme (at global, regional, sub-regional and national levels) and the Forestry Department in general to be involved also in this strategic objective. However, as the contribution to the SO5 core team will be a long term task, additional human resources will be needed in the fire management field to maintain the support to the (sub) regional and national officers and projects.

14. FAO is strongly involved in the preparation of the next International Wildland Fire Conference in 2015 in the Republic of Korea. Like during the last Conference in 2011 in South Africa, the Forestry Department will advocate for a programme which reflects Integrated Fire Management including a Community Based Fire Management approach.

### IV. POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

15. Forest and rangelands fires continue to be a severe concern for the countries in Near East Region. It can be anticipated that the expected climate change will increase the intensity and frequency of wildfires. Increasing forest and rangelands fires will contribute to more greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere. The Commission may wish to:

- discuss the eventual need for a landscape approach in fire management as wildfires affect both forest and rangelands in the region. The importance of a multi-disciplinary approach might be needed to include issues like forest and fire management, improved rangeland management, improved grazing schemes, etc , to avoid the use of fire;
- discuss what measures could be suggested to counter the increasing risk of uncontrolled wildfires in the region, for example through increasing intraregional cooperation, closer linkage of forest fire management in climate change related initiatives, implementation of existing guidelines or need for new guidelines;
- propose that investments in REDD+ and other climate change related initiatives include a component on wildfire management;
- facilitate south-south collaboration, both within the Near East Region as with other regions of the world, to support and implement projects on fire management and wildfire control;
- mandate FAO with identifying more and additional financial and human resources.

16. Member countries of the Commission may wish also to discuss how to intensify the regional cooperation within the Near East Region to better use regionally available resources to wildfire management. This discussion may include the future collaboration between NEFRC, the Regional Networks GIZ (Germany), the Joint Research Centre of the EU in Ispra (EFFIS), Silva Mediterranea, the French Global Environmental Facility and FAO.

17. Commission members may further wish to provide recommendations for the next International Wildland Fire Conference (Republic of Korea, 2015).