

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE TO FIFTH INTERNATIONAL WILDLAND FIRE CONFERENCE
Sun City, South Africa, 10 May 2011

*Delivered by Mr. Johann G. Goldammer,
Leader of the UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire and
Coordinator of the Global Wildland Fire network*

It is a pleasure to send my greetings to the participants in this important conference. 29 Apr 11

The year 2011 has already seen a number of terrifying wildland fires in Western Australia, in the high mountain ecosystems of Nepal, in Mexico, the United States, Russia and, most recently, in Europe. Other disasters have made clear how vulnerable our cities and communities are and how much more effort is required to reduce our vulnerability.

Wildland fires destabilize ecosystems and the global atmosphere, and have clear implications for human health and security. Unlike other natural hazards, wildland fires are primarily caused by human activities. Measures to prevent them – such as education, awareness-raising and capacity-building -- are well known and within reach. Community-Based Fire Management is particularly important.

The transboundary effects of wildland fires associated with long-range smoke transport and emissions are prompting the international community to strengthen cooperation in fire management. International organizations and civil society groups are working to build capacity, develop advanced technologies and promote sustainable land-use practices.

The UN system is strongly committed to this effort. Our work encompasses many aspects of fire management, including agriculture, forestry, health, science, the environment, emergency response and weather forecasting and monitoring.

We welcome the efforts of fire specialists to build a culture of prevention and to develop a spirit of global cooperation. This conference, held in conjunction with the Third Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva, can galvanize our efforts to reduce risk and vulnerability. I encourage you to identify real solutions that will help communities and nations to better handle the adverse impacts of fires and to build safer, more sustainable societies for all. Please accept my best wishes for a successful conference.



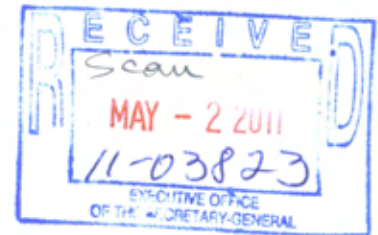
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Note to Mr. Nambiar

**"LIVING WITH FIRE – ADDRESSING GLOBAL CHANGE THROUGH
INTEGRATED FIRE MANAGEMENT" CONFERENCE,
SUN CITY, SOUTH AFRICA, 9-13 MAY 2011**

With reference to the above mentioned conference, I would like to suggest that the Secretary-General delivers a written statement to be read by Dr. Johann G. Goldammer, leader of the UNECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Forest Fire, and Coordinator of the Global Wildland Fire network, at the opening ceremony in Sun City, South Africa, on 9 May 2011.

A series of International Wildland Fire Conferences was initiated in the late 1980s to bring together the science community, the technical members of the operational fire management community, those affected by fire, and the authorities concerned and mandated with developing policies and implementation strategies in wildland fire management, at national and international levels, including the UN.

The 2011 conference will be an Associated Event to the Third Session of the UNISDR Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction and will be connected to the Round Table discussion via video conference link on Tuesday 10 May 2011.

Given the significance of fire in many countries globally, and the endeavour of the international wildland fire community to alert national and international policy makers by providing evidence that wildland fires are to be considered a major global problem, an opening statement of the Secretary-General would be of great impact, in particular as a follow up of his intervention at the 25-years Memorial Conference of the Chernobyl accident, since radioactive wildfires are an important part of the agenda of the Wildland Fire Conference.

I would be grateful if you could kindly forward the attached draft statement to the Secretary-General for his approval.

Margareta Wahlstrom
29 April 2011

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Opening Statement by the Secretary-General of the United Nations

H.E. BAN Ki-moon

to the 5th International Wildland Fire Conference

at 10th May Plenary of 3rd Global Platform

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The year 2011 started very sadly with a number of terrifying wildland fires in Western Australia, in the high mountain ecosystems of Nepal, in Mexico, the United States, Russia and most recently in Europe, and other disasters, which made clear how vulnerable our cities and communities are and how much more effort is required to reduce our vulnerability.

Wildland fires are one of the major natural hazards contributing to destabilization of ecosystems and the global atmosphere, and affecting human health and security. Unlike other natural hazards, wildland fires are primarily caused by human activities. Measures to prevent unwanted fires as appropriate education, awareness building, and capacity building are well known and within reach.

Community-Based Fire Management, in particular, can enable local communities to become actively involved in management of fire at local level and is key to reducing the occurrence of uncontrolled wildfires or inappropriate use of fire.

The transboundary effects of wildland fires associated with long-range smoke transport and emissions into the global atmosphere have far reaching effects, are prompting the international community to enhance international (cross-boundary) cooperation in fire management.

Reducing wildland fire risk calls for cooperation and coordination among many groups. International organizations and civil society organizations working at levels from local to international to build capacities, develop advanced technologies, and promoting traditional and sustainable land-use practices.

The UN system is committed as well. Several agencies and programmes are mandated to contribute to enhancing fire management capabilities through addressing issues related to human health (WHO), agriculture and forestry (FAO), early warning of fire weather and monitoring of fire occurrence (WMO, UNOOSA/SPIDER), environment (UNEP), emergency response (UNEP/OCHA JEU), addressing specific regional issues (e.g., UNECE), advancing science and capacity building (UNU) and promoting a culture of prevention (UNISDR, UNESCO),

We welcome the efforts of the international community of fire specialists, to build a culture of prevention in fire management, and develop a spirit of global cooperation, (which may finally lead to voluntary and possibly future legal agreements for exchanging knowledge and capacity in fire management, and in efficient international response to the adverse impacts of fire on the global environment and humanity)

Dear colleagues, this International Wildland Fire Conference, held in conjunction with the Third Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva can be a significant milestone in galvanizing our commitment to reduce the risk of and vulnerability to wildland fires. I encourage to identify real solutions that will help communities and nations to achieve sustainable development and to commit to turning words into action.

I wish you a successful conference