



PRESS RELEASE

UN/ISDR 2005/22
Tuesday 23 August 2005

FIRES IN PORTUGAL

“ There is a need for stronger cooperation between countries”

More than 140,000 hectares of forest and farmland have been destroyed in Portugal since the beginning of the summer affecting many households. The fires compelled the Portuguese Government to call on the European Union for help.

“ What is happening in Portugal is a clear demonstration that there is a strong need for closer cooperation between countries on fire management” says Johann Goldammer, Director of the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) in Germany. “ The European Commission has recognised this lack of collaboration between the EU States and is working on it, but more needs to be done to enhance regional cooperation and develop common standards on technologies and fire prevention procedures and languages. ”

The GFMC was established in 1998 as a contribution of Germany to the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). It is a member of the Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction and serves as coordinator of the Working Group on Wildland Fire (2001-2003). It also coordinates the ISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group and the ISDR Global Wildland Fire Network.

Other big partners in the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction are the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and the Food Agriculture Organisation (FAO) that coordinate the challenge of reducing forest fires around the world and in particular in Asia where they have become a threat to development.

The current fire situation in Portugal has been enhanced by the change in land-use. The rural exodus has left a large area of land non-cultivated, which has increased the amount of combustible materials, which can trigger big fires when droughts occur.

“ There are many measures that can be taken which can contribute to reduce the number of wildland fires, says Johann Goldammer. The use of the forest biomass for energy products is one. It offers an increasingly valuable opportunity especially now when oil prices are soaring. Governments should pay more attention to these resources because it is a way to reduce the number of fires in many countries while increasing the economic benefits to communities.”

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The ISDR Secretariat strongly supports this idea.

“Every country should follow basic rules of fire prevention and increase its expertise on fire management with its neighbours. The treatment of combustible material, proper training for safe use of fire for agricultural purposes and a better behaviour by the public to avoid triggering fires are some of the main rules, says Salvano Briceño, Director of the Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. National platforms for disaster risk reduction have a role to play to make forest management one of their top priorities and to better prepare their populations to reduce risk and vulnerability to natural hazards.”

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