

22nd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum
“Responding to Environmental Challenges
with a View to Promoting Cooperation and Security in the OSCE area”
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Session III: Panel Debate - Improving environmental security: How can we reduce natural disaster risks?

Abstract of Panelist Prof. Dr. Johann Georg Goldammer, Director, Global Fire Monitoring Center

Theme to be addressed: Lessons learned from the past

ENVSEC's involvement in the field of wildfire management is based on the OSCE-led Environmental Assessment Mission to fire affected territories in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region in 2006 and the Joint OSCE/UNEP Environmental Assessment Mission to Georgia in 2008. Both assessments demonstrated that the damage caused by wildfires in the South Caucasus can partially be attributed to the absence of effective forest fire management systems. To assist the South Caucasus countries in enhancing their fire management capacities, the OSCE within the framework of the ENVSEC Initiative launched in 2009 the project “Enhancing National Capacities on Fire Management and Wildfire Disaster Risk Reduction in the South Caucasus”. The project is conducted in partnership with the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) based in Germany. Within the period 2009-2013, the project has gone through three phases: first phase focused on national and regional trainings within the UNISDR Regional Southeast Europe/Caucasus Wildland Fire Network. In the second phase forest fire vulnerability assessments were conducted in all three countries. In Georgia, a draft policy document was prepared. At the regional level, a training workshop was held in Antalya, Turkey in 2010, with the participation of 30 representatives from the fire fighting agencies of the South Caucasus countries as well as selected South Eastern European countries. In the third phase, the project has been focusing on further developing and implementing national fire management policies in the countries of the region, supported by training activities and participation of countries in major international events and networks on wildfire management. The next phase of the project will support development of a Fire Danger Rating System and organization of regional trainings.

There are a number of lessons identified in the project:

- Addressing a disaster risk such as wildfire requires a holistic approach, i.e. across natural and cultural landscapes and institutional responsibilities
- Accordingly, a cross-sectoral mechanism must be created to initiate a dialogue in society and to identify the underlying reasons of wildfire risks (socio-economic, environmental, climate change, institutional), with emphasis on involvement of civil society
- Any solution requiring legal and institutional reforms and investments for capacity building (technical, human resources) requires the formulation of a national policy based on consensus and co-operation with the involvement of all relevant national stakeholders.
- Donor-supported projects and programmes must have a long-term scope and timeline since efficient, effective and sustainable capacities cannot be realized in short-term projects
- Establishment and embedding national measures in an international nexus (e.g. through networks, bilateral and multilateral agreements) will benefit from experiences of other countries and regions and thus are not only economic but also allow the development of interoperable systems for cross-boundary exchange and assistance in wildfire emergency situations, and to jointly achieve the goals of related legally binding international agreements.

Short CV:

Professor Johann Georg Goldammer is head of the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC), which is operating as a contribution of Germany to the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) and the United Nations University (UNU). At Freiburg University he is serving as professor for fire ecology and fire management. He Goldammer is also serving as coordinator the UNISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group and the Global Wildland Fire Network, which is a Thematic Platform of the UNISDR. He is working closely with the a number of specialized UN agencies and programmes, such as FAO and Joint UNEP-OCHA Joint Environment Unit, Emergency Services Branch, and is member of the Steering Committee of the Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies (AGEE). The GFMC has cooperated with the OSCE since 2006 in building fire management capacities in the South Caucasus region aimed to reduce the threat of wildfires to forests and other ecosystems in the region.