

Forging paths to sustainable wildfire prevention through collaborative governance

Friday, 1st of November 2024 | 1:15 PM – 2:45 PM EDT at the United Nations Headquarters, Room 8

Background

As climate change accelerates, the frequency and severity of wildfires have reached unprecedented levels across the globe. From the bushfires in Australia that devastated nearly 1.5 million square kilometers, to the fires in Greece, Portugal, and Canada, these events have led to immense loss of biodiversity, land degradation, socio-economic damage, and CO2 emissions, affecting communities worldwide. In light of this growing crisis, we are organizing a side event on November 1st, World Ecology Day, focusing on wildfire prevention and management under this year's theme of environmental protection and sustainability. Recent studies and events, including the UN's Department Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) Policy Brief #111, highlight the need for comprehensive strategies that integrate scientific, traditional, and policy-driven approaches to wildfire management.

In 2023 alone, the Mediterranean region, North America, and Australia faced record-breaking wildfires, leaving indelible marks on the environment and human health. Notable incidents, such as the wildfire in Evros, Greece, which threatened the habitat of the endangered Egyptian Vulture, and the widespread air pollution in New York City caused by wildfires in Canada, serve as reminders that wildfire management is a global challenge that demands global cooperation.

The establishment of international frameworks such as the FAO-UNEP Global Fire Management Hub and the outcomes of the 8th International Wildland Fire Conference underscore the critical role of cross-sectoral and international partnerships in combating wildfires. The Global Fire Management Hub, in particular, advocates for a 5R (Review, Risk Reduction, Readiness, Response, and Recovery) approach, emphasizing capacity-building and integrated fire management strategies.

Objective:

This event aims to address the legal, ecological, and socio-economic aspects of wildfires by bringing together experts, government representatives, and international stakeholders to discuss proactive measures for wildfire prevention and management. We will explore best practices from affected regions like Greece, Australia, and Canada, focusing on their national strategies, and examining how international cooperation and integrated governance can mitigate wildfire risks.

Our Objective:

As representatives of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, we take great pride in the Ecumenical Patriarchate's longstanding dedication to environmental stewardship. The Patriarchate has consistently highlighted the theological and ethical imperatives of protecting the environment, advocating for a collective responsibility in addressing the challenges posed by climate change. Our work also extends to raising funds for the aftermath of wildfires, and now, we aim to take a more proactive approach in being on the frontlines of wildfire prevention.

Goals:

- Encourage knowledge-sharing and policy dialogue on preventing wildfires and minimizing their destructive impacts.
- Foster the development of international legal frameworks and cooperative initiatives, such as the Fire Management Voluntary Guidelines, to ensure sustainable land and fire management practices.
- Strengthen the international community's commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by focusing on Goals 13 (Climate Action), 15 (Life on Land), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

This event serves as a call to action for governments, civil society, and religious organizations to join forces in confronting the global wildfire crisis and securing a sustainable future for all.