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“Responding to Environmental Challenges
with a View to Promoting Cooperation and Security in the OSCE area”
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Session IV: A co-operative response to environmental challenges: OSCE experience and lessons learnt for the future

Extended Summary of Speaker Prof. Dr. Johann Georg Goldammer, Director, Global Fire Monitoring Center

Topic: OSCE experiences in enhancing national capacities in fire management and wildfire disaster risk reduction

The involvement of the OSCE in the field of fire management was initiated by 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 2009-2014, the project has focused on three approaches in each of the three South Caucasus countries:

- Expert assessment of the ecological role of fire and wildfire threats in the environment and society
- Initiation and facilitation of a national, cross-sectoral dialogue to identify issues and needs for action in fire management through the establishment of a National Round Table in Fire Management and a national inter-agency coordination mechanism with participation of civil society (ongoing since 2009)
- Basic capacity building in fire management of government institutions at national level (trainers and key personnel responsible for fire management) (ongoing since 2009)
- Initiation of approaches to involve local communities in fire management (since 2014)
- Joint regional training in fire management aimed at exchanging expertise and facilitate cross-boundary fire management in SE Europe / South Caucasus) (2010 and 2014)
- Development of a regional Fire Danger Rating System (initiated in 2014)
- Involvement of the South Caucasus countries in international thematic networking through the UNISDR Regional SE Europe / Caucasus Wildland Fire Network (since 2007) and the participation in the development of proposals for coordinated international cooperation such as the participation in the UNECE/FAO Regional Forum on Cross-boundary Fire Management (2013)

There are a number of lessons identified in the project, which may assist to conceptualize approaches in the risk reduction in general, e.g.:

- 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.