

Press release - Seminar of the Group of Experts on Forest Fires in Latin American and Caribbean (GEFF LAC) on prevention and early warning systems for forest fires

The **Group of Experts on Forest Fires in Latin American and Caribbean Forest Fire Experts Group (GEFF LAC) Seminar on prevention and early warning systems for forest fires** took place in **Punta del Este, Uruguay on 2 and 3 March 2023**, with the aim of sharing experience and best practices among experts from national fire management agencies in Latin America, representatives of the **European Union (the Joint Research Centre, DG ECHO/ Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations and EU Delegations)** and international organisations (the **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations/FAO**, the **United Nations Environment Programme/UNEP**, the **Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization/ACTO**).

This seminar is part of a collaboration between the **European Union** and the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) under the project **Support for forest fire management in Latin America and the Caribbean**, an initiative that aims to improve national capacities to prevent forest fires from a regional perspective, relying on EU best practice: the **European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS)** and the **European Group on Forest Fires (EGFF)**.

Mr. Sergio Rico, Director of Uruguay's National Emergency System at the Presidency of the Republic of Uruguay stressed the importance of such joint initiatives and discussions *“for greater cooperation and understanding through the exchange of experience and academic theory”*, and reiterated that *“the exchange of experiences was essential to reduce risks and disasters”*.

Dr. Jesús San-Miguel, representative of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) and leader of the GEFF LAC, highlighted the need for a clear concept or document on the integrated use of fire in the region. Similarly, he pointed out the need to clarify the definition of prevention, *“some nations include preparedness and mitigation while others do not”*.

Mr. Pieter Van Lierop, Forestry Officer at the LAC Regional Office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), stressed that integrated fire management must take into account an analysis of the whole fire management problem: *“it goes beyond forest fires by involving politicians, academics and professionals and improving their ability to collaborate and work cohesively with the resources required at the political level”*. During his intervention, he reiterated the concept of the ‘5 Rs’, developed by the FAO, which revolve around knowledge, risk reduction, preparedness, response capacity and restoration as a strategy to implement integrated management in LAC.

Mr. Carlos Armando Salinas Montes, Administrative Director of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO), shared the progress made towards an ACTO memorandum of understanding, *“with the commitment of all experts involved in agreeing on definitions of risk management and requiring an integrated system of cooperation in fire management”*. During his intervention, he prioritised the construction of the Amazonian network for integrated fire



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management, made up of representatives of the eight ACTO member countries, and highlighted the role of regional training.

Mr. Raul Salazar, Head of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), explained that the emphasis on holistic and integrated approaches to forest fire management “*must not only integrate science, technology and management, but also take a broader perspective and consider the impact of socio-economic development factors*”.

The exchange of knowledge and best practices **from the GEFF LAC**, together with harmonised information provided by the **Global Wildfire Information System (GWIS)**, could lead to strategic actions to minimise the impact of forest fires in the region and improve fire policies at national and regional level. The group is composed of fire managers in relevant ministries and agencies who are responsible for fire management in the various phases of the fire cycle, from prevention, preparedness and firefighting, to the restoration of areas damaged by forest fires.

Reinforcing the commitment of experts to disaster risk reduction at regional, national and local levels

In the three previous **GEFF LAC** meetings (in December 2021 online, in July 2022 in Santiago de Chile and in November 2022 in Brasilia), Group members have actively collaborated in the elaboration of the first “**Annual report on forest fire impacts in Latin America in 2021**” and the “**Mapping of fire information systems in Latin American countries**”, as well as proposing a number of initiatives to improve forest fire management in their region.

GEFF LAC members will soon participate in the **4th Meeting of the Group of Experts on Forest Fires in Latin America and the Caribbean (GEFF LAC)** in Porto, Portugal, on 15-16 May 2023. The meeting will give participants the opportunity to attend the side event, [8th International Wildland Fire Conference \(IWFC\)](#). (16.05 – 19.05).

For more information, click here:

<https://rp-americas.undrr.org/es/2023/agenda/dias-de-preparacion-rp-americas>

<https://gwis.jrc.ec.europa.eu/projects/support-wildfire-management-lac>

