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U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
BUREAU FOR DEMOCRACY, CONFLICT, AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE (DCHA)
OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE (OFDA)

Southeast Europe – Wildfires and Drought

Fact Sheet #1, Fiscal Year (FY) 2007

September 18, 2007

BACKGROUND AND KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- Extremely hot temperatures and below normal rainfall across southeast Europe from June to August 2007 led to numerous wildfires in nearly every country in the region. Although wildfires are annual occurrences, and the local ecosystems are fire-adapted, the 2007 season was among the worst on record, according to national firefighting authorities and government officials.
- In response to numerous requests for international assistance, the U.S. Government (USG), through USAID/OFDA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture U.S. Forest Service (USFS), provided fire-fighting assistance to Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, and Macedonia.
- Drought conditions in Moldova led to widespread crop and livestock losses. In response, USAID/OFDA also supported agriculture and food security activities to replenish Moldovan farmers' seed stocks.

NUMBERS AT A GLANCE	SOURCE
Albania	15 homes destroyed, 2,000 hectares land burned
Bulgaria	1 killed, 9 injured, 230,000 hectares land burned
Croatia	12 killed, 170,000 hectares land burned, city of Dubrovnik threatened
Greece	76 people killed, 270,000 hectares of land burned
Macedonia	1 killed, 1 million affected, 3,000 hectares of land burned
Moldova	Drought conditions across most of the country

FY 2007 HUMANITARIAN FUNDING PROVIDED TO DATE

USAID/OFDA Assistance to Albania.....	\$225,000
USAID/OFDA Assistance to Bulgaria	\$50,000
USAID/OFDA Assistance to Croatia	\$50,000
USAID/OFDA Assistance to Greece	\$1,950,833
USAID/OFDA Assistance to Macedonia	\$50,000
USAID/OFDA Assistance to Moldova	\$250,000
Total USAID Humanitarian Assistance to Southeast Europe for Wildfires and Drought	\$2,575,833

CURRENT SITUATION

Albania

- In mid-July, 150 forest fires burned across 21 out of Albania's 36 districts. The most serious fires were located in Kolonja, Vlora, Puka, and Tropoja districts. In total, the fires destroyed 15 homes, consumed 4 fire trucks, and burned 2,000 hectares of forest land. In addition to threatening residential and forest areas, widespread smoke also reportedly led to health issues, particularly in women and children. The Government of Albania responded to the fires with 1,300 military personnel, 500 police, and 800 firefighters. However, the rough topography and terrain surrounding the fire locations and the remote location of the fires hampered the ability of fire responders to fight the blazes on the ground.

Bulgaria

- In late July, Bulgarian authorities reported as many as 2,000 wildfires across the country. Extremely high temperatures, heavy winds, and ongoing dry conditions exacerbated the fire situation and caused the blazes to spread. The fires killed one person, injured 9 others, and destroyed 230,000 hectares of woodlands, parks, and farmlands. Smoke inhalation also led large numbers of Bulgarians to seek medical assistance. According to the U.S. Embassy in Sofia, the most affected districts included Veliko Turnovo, Kyustendil, Montana, Sodia, Smolyan, and Stara Zagora in the southern and western regions of the country.

Croatia

- Unusually hot and dry weather and strong winds exacerbated the 2007 wildfire season in Croatia, according to the U.S. Embassy in Zagreb. More than 800 separate blazes in July in southern, northeastern, and northwestern districts burned 170,000 hectares of woodlands, natural park land, and farms, and caused a large number of civilians to suffer from smoke inhalation. Twelve Croatian firefighters were also killed while combating the blazes. The worst affected area was in the southern province of Dalmatia, where the fires destroyed houses in the hills surrounding the town of Dubrovnik. Unexploded landmines from the regional war in the early 1990s, together with mountainous and inaccessible terrain, hampered efforts to combat the blazes.

Greece

- According to Greek firefighting authorities, the 2007 wildfire season in Greece was the worst on record, killing 76 people, injuring numerous others, and burning 270,000 hectares of land. A lengthy heat wave in June and unusually strong, dry winds in August exacerbated the country's risk for wildfire. During August, Greek authorities faced an average of up to 85 fire starts and 200 active blazes per day across the country. From August 23 to August 31, more than 130 fires broke out in the Peloponnese alone, including 82 blazes between August 23 and 25.
- In June and July, wildfires ravaged more than 30,000 hectares of wild land in the north of Greece, on the Island of Crete, and around Athens, including on Mount Parnitha and Mount Pendeli. These blazes reportedly killed ten people, including two Greek firefighters and two Hellenic Air Force pilots flying firefighting aircraft, three part-time firefighters in Crete, and three civilians in Egio Prefecture.
- In late August, fires in the Peloponnese and Evia regions killed an additional 66 people and burned across more than 240,000 hectares of land. The fires spread rapidly across the dry terrain, overwhelming the response capacity of Hellenic Fire Brigade. Estimates of the number of homes and buildings destroyed by the fires range from 1,700 to approximately 4,000. Thousands of livestock also perished in the flames.

Macedonia

- In July, heat wave-related wildfires throughout Macedonia consumed more than 3,000 hectares of forests in 32 municipalities. According to the U.S. Embassy in Skopje, the fires caused one death due to smoke inhalation and directly impacted approximately half of Macedonia's population of 2 million people. On July 18, the Government of Macedonia declared a state of emergency due to the high temperatures and 28 different wildfires across the country. However, rain and cooler temperatures in early August brought an end to the wildfire crisis in Macedonia.

Moldova

- Extremely high temperatures and minimal rainfall during the 2007 summer led to widespread drought conditions in 28 of Moldova's 32 regions. According to a joint assessment by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and U.N. World Food Program (WFP), the drought impacted 84 percent of Moldova's arable land, leading to national economic losses of approximately \$406.7 million in failed crops and livestock deaths. The FAO/WFP assessment further indicated that farmers lacked the financial means to purchase seeds for the fall 2007 planting season. On July 26, President Vladimir Voronin declared the drought in Moldova to be a disaster. The Government of Moldova indicated that farmers needed approximately 4,000 metric tons of seeds for fall planting.

USG HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Albania

- On July 27, U.S. Embassy Chargé d'Affaires Stephen Cristina declared a disaster due to the loss of property and livelihoods and potential loss of life as a result of the wildfires in Albania. In response, USAID/OFDA provided an immediate \$50,000 through USAID/Albania to the Government of Albania's Department of Civil Emergency to cover the fuel costs for a firefighting aircraft, which made approximately 54 sorties and assisted Albanian firefighters bring under control and extinguish numerous fires in the southern part of the country. In early August, USAID/OFDA provided an additional \$175,000 through USAID/Albania to support the operational costs of firefighting aircrafts for 10 days and to improve the Government of Albania's emergency preparedness capacity building.

Bulgaria

- On August 1, U.S. Embassy Chargé d'Affaires Alexander Karagiannis declared a disaster due to the impact of the wildfires in Bulgaria. In response, USAID/OFDA provided \$50,000 through USAID/Bulgaria for the purchase of chain saws and radio communication equipment for the Bulgarian Civil Protection Agency.

Croatia

- On August 7, U.S. Ambassador Robert A. Bradtke declared a disaster due to the impact of the wildfires in Croatia. In response, USAID/OFDA provided \$50,000 through USAID/Croatia for the local purchase of emergency firefighting equipment to assist fire responders in Konavle and Zupa Dubrovacka municipalities surrounding Dubrovnik.

Greece

- On August 27, U.S. Embassy Charge d'Affaires, Thomas Countryman declared a disaster due to the magnitude of the wildfires in Greece and the damage caused to loss of life, property, and livelihoods. In response, USAID/OFDA immediately provided \$100,000 through the U.S. Embassy in Athens to the Hellenic Red Cross for the local purchase and distribution of emergency relief commodities for fire-affected households.
- On September 5 and 6, USAID/OFDA transported additional emergency relief commodities from the USAID/OFDA warehouse in Pisa, Italy, to Greece. The commodities, which included 300 tents, 3,000 sleeping bags, and 10,000 blankets, were consigned to the Hellenic Red Cross for fire-affected households. The total value of the emergency relief commodities, including transportation, was approximately \$500,000.
- USAID/OFDA also worked with USFS to procure and transport emergency fire-fighting equipment, including 3,000 complete nomex fire suits, for the Hellenic Fire Brigade.
- From September 1 to 8, USAID/OFDA deployed a six-person interagency technical team to wildfire-affected areas in Greece to assess the impact of the wildfires and evaluate potential hazards created by newly burned terrain. The team provided technical assistance to the Government of Greece in responding to the current emergency and established a basis for continuing cooperation on longer-term wildfire management and ecosystem management issues. The team, which included representatives from USAID/OFDA and USFS, visited burn sites in the Evia, Attica, and Peloponnese regions accompanied by officials from the U.S. Embassy in Athens, the Hellenic Fire Brigade, and the Greek Foreign Ministry. Following the field visits, the team met with Greek officials, including the Minister of Public Order, the Director of the Hellenic Department of Forestry, and the Secretary General of the Ministry for Public Order.
- To date in FY 2007, USAID/OFDA has provided more than \$600,000 in emergency assistance to Greece. USAID/OFDA is also providing an additional \$1.35 million through existing agreements with the USFS to implement a technical assistance program in coordination with Greek fire response and forestry management authorities. This program, which will be implemented through the remainder of 2007 and throughout 2008, will address immediate ecosystem stabilization needs and develop longer-term cooperation initiatives proposed during the September technical assessment visit.

Macedonia

- On July 25, U.S. Ambassador Gillian A. Milovanovic declared a disaster due to loss of property and livelihoods from the wildfires. In response, USAID/OFDA provided \$50,000 through USAID/Macedonia to assist emergency responders in fighting the wildfires.

Moldova

- On August 24, U.S. Embassy Chargé d'Affaires Kelly A. Keiderling declared a disaster due to the impact of lost crops, livestock, and livelihoods on Moldova's largely agriculture-based economy. In response, USAID/OFDA provided \$50,000 through USAID/Moldova to the Citizen's Network for Foreign Affairs (CNFA), a local USAID-funded development organization, for the local purchase and distribution of seeds to drought-affected farmers and continued to work with USAID/Moldova to monitor the drought situation. In addition, CNFA is reprogramming \$100,000 in USAID development assistance for the local purchase of seeds for drought-affected farmers. Due to ongoing need, USAID/OFDA provided an additional \$200,000 in early September to CNFA for the purchase of additional seeds.

USAID HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO ALBANIA

<i>Implementing Partner</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Amount</i>
USAID/OFDA ASSISTANCE¹			
USAID/Albania	Support for Firefighting Aircraft Operations	Affected Areas	\$50,000
USAID/Albania	Support for Firefighting Aircraft Operations and Capacity Building	Affected Areas	\$175,000
TOTAL USAID/OFDA HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO ALBANIA IN FY 2007			\$225,000
TOTAL USAID HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO ALBANIA IN FY 2007			\$225,000

¹ USAID/OFDA funding represents anticipated or actual obligated amounts as of September 18, 2007

USAID HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO BULGARIA

<i>Implementing Partner</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Amount</i>
USAID/OFDA ASSISTANCE¹			
USAID/Bulgaria	Emergency Relief Supplies	Affected Areas	\$50,000
TOTAL USAID/OFDA HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO BULGARIA IN FY 2007			\$50,000
TOTAL USAID HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO BULGARIA IN FY 2007			\$50,000

¹ USAID/OFDA funding represents anticipated or actual obligated amounts as of September 18, 2007

USAID HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO CROATIA

<i>Implementing Partner</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Amount</i>
USAID/OFDA ASSISTANCE¹			
USAID/Croatia	Emergency Relief Supplies	Affected Areas	\$50,000
TOTAL USAID/OFDA HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO CROATIA IN FY 2007			\$50,000
TOTAL USAID HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO CROATIA IN FY 2007			\$50,000

¹ USAID/OFDA funding represents anticipated or actual obligated amounts as of September 18, 2007

USAID HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO GREECE

<i>Implementing Partner</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Amount</i>
USAID/OFDA ASSISTANCE¹			
Hellenic Red Cross	Emergency Relief Supplies	Affected Areas	\$100,000
Hellenic Red Cross	Emergency Relief Supplies from USAID/OFDA's Pisa Warehouse	Affected Areas	\$500,833
USFS ²	Technical Assistance to the Government of Greece	Affected Areas	\$1,350,000
TOTAL USAID/OFDA HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO GREECE IN FY 2007			\$1,950,833
TOTAL USAID HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO GREECE IN FY 2007			\$1,950,833

¹ USAID/OFDA funding represents anticipated or actual obligated amounts as of September 18, 2007

² This funding represents both monies reprogrammed from existing agreements between USAID/OFDA and USFS as well as new amounts that OFDA will provide later in FY 2007 or early FY 2008 through USFS for technical assistance to the Government of Greece.

USAID HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO MACEDONIA

<i>Implementing Partner</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Amount</i>
USAID/OFDA ASSISTANCE¹			
USAID/Macedonia	Emergency Relief Supplies	Affected Areas	\$50,000
TOTAL USAID/OFDA HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO MACEDONIA IN FY 2007			\$50,000
TOTAL USAID HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO MACEDONIA IN FY 2007			\$50,000

¹ USAID/OFDA funding represents anticipated or actual obligated amounts as of September 18, 2007

USAID HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO MOLDOVA

<i>Implementing Partner</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Amount</i>
USAID/OFDA ASSISTANCE¹			
CNFA	Agriculture and Food Security	Affected Areas	\$250,000
TOTAL USAID/OFDA HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO MACEDONIA IN FY 2007			\$250,000
TOTAL USAID HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO MACEDONIA IN FY 2007			\$250,000

¹ USAID/OFDA funding represents anticipated or actual obligated amounts as of September 18, 2007

TOTAL USAID HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO SOUTHEAST EUROPE FOR WILDFIRES AND DROUGHT IN FY 2007	\$2,575,833
TOTAL USG HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO SOUTHEAST EUROPE FOR WILDFIRES AND DROUGHT IN FY 2007	\$2,575,833

PUBLIC DONATION INFORMATION

- The most effective way people can assist relief efforts is by making cash contributions to humanitarian organizations that are conducting relief operations. Information on organizations responding to the humanitarian situation in Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia, and/or Moldova may be available at www.reliefweb.int.
- USAID encourages cash donations because they allow aid professionals to procure the exact items needed (often in the affected region); reduce the burden on scarce resources (such as transportation routes, staff time, warehouse space, etc); can be transferred very quickly and without transportation costs; support the economy of the disaster-stricken region; and ensure culturally, dietary, and environmentally appropriate assistance.
- More information can be found at:
 - USAID: www.usaid.gov – Keyword: Donations
 - The Center for International Disaster Information: www.cidi.org or (703) 276-1914
 - Information on relief activities of the humanitarian community can be found at www.reliefweb.int