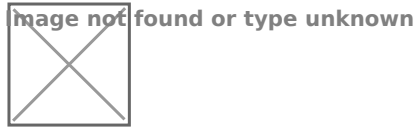


Department of Inter-Orthodox, Ecumenical, and Interfaith Relations Co-Hosts Panel Discussion on Wildfire Prevention at the United Nations



On World Ecology Day, November 1, 2024, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, through the Ecumenical Department, in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of Greece to the UN, the Permanent Mission of Australia to the UN, the Sovereign Order of Malta Permanent Mission to the UN, the World Council of Churches, and Foley Hoag LLP, hosted a side event titled “Forging Paths to Sustainable Wildfire Prevention through Collaborative Governance” at the United Nations Headquarters. This event brought together global experts, government representatives, and advocates to discuss strategies for proactive wildfire prevention and sustainable land management amid growing environmental challenges.

Rev. Nicolas Kazarian, Director of the Ecumenical Department, offered welcoming remarks, conveying the greetings and blessings of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America. In his opening remarks, Deputy Permanent Representative Ioannis Stamatekos of the Greek Permanent Mission highlighted the critical need for “working with scientific knowledge, partnering with stakeholders, and fostering international cooperation,” emphasizing, “we cannot eliminate wildfires, but we can eliminate the risks.”

Sheona McKenna, Development and Humanitarian Counselor from the Australian Permanent Mission, presented insights from Northern Australia’s Fire Management Emissions Reduction Fund initiative. She discussed how cultural burning practices are used to protect natural habitats and reduce fire risk and emissions, emphasizing that Indigenous knowledge is a powerful tool in achieving ecological balance and climate resilience.

Throughout the panel discussions, moderated by Rev. Nicholas Anton, Director of Programs at the Ecumenical Department, participants examined best practices and innovative approaches. Professor Chad Oliver shared insights into forest management techniques that improve resilience to wildfires. Peter Gondo from the

United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) discussed policy interventions emerging from the global response to wildfires and introduced recent initiatives on fire management.

Blaine Wiggins, COO of Canada's National Indigenous Fire Safety Council, underscored the importance of traditional fire management for ecosystem conservation and noted the need for greater research and data to strengthen these practices. He stressed that traditional values provide an invaluable perspective on land stewardship, contrasting with solely economic assessments. Toni-Shea Chief of the NY Liaison Office for UNDRR presented current wildfire risk management initiatives, while Nicholas Renzler, Counsel at Foley Hoag LLP, discussed the complexities of international frameworks for wildfire prevention, especially concerning cross-border incidents.

The event concluded with remarks from Ourania Markaki, Program Coordinator at the Ecumenical Department, who thanked attendees for their engagement and support for this vital cause.

In observance of World Ecology Day, this event was a powerful reminder of the need for international cooperation, the integration of Indigenous knowledge, the commitment of faith-based organizations, and comprehensive policy frameworks to address the growing threat of wildfires globally.

Recording of the panel discussion is available [here](#).

Photos: Department of Inter-Orthodox, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations.

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