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PREFACE

Forest fires, either man-made or natural, as a consequence of extreme drought, occur in many parts of the world. Smoke from forest fires consists mainly of fine particulate matter in the respirable range and to a lesser extent, of carbon monoxide and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. During the episode of smoke in the South East Asian countries, monitoring of particulate matter of mean aerodynamic diameter at or below 10 μm has shown that short-term air quality standards of WHO´s 1987 air quality guidelines for respirable particulate matter are largely exceeded.

The recurrence of transboundary smoke originating from uncontrolled forest fires in many countries around the world causing acute and long-term respiratory health problems requires a comprehensive strategy based on broad international consensus. Any comprehensive strategy must include:

a) rapid detection capability of uncontrolled vegetation fire events on a global scale;

b) the gathering of useful and reliable monitoring data and health surveillance;

c) the dissemination of information to all affected parties for appropriate decision making; and

d) the development of national environmental and health response plans to vegetation fire events, based on an international guideline.

The WHO, in a collaboration of the Department of Emergency and Humanitarian Action (EHA) and the Department of Protection of Human Environment (PHE), with the support of the Ministry of Health, Japan, UNEP and WMO convened an Expert Meeting on the Health Guidelines for Vegetation Fire Events in Lima, Peru, 6-9 October 1998. Background papers on the various issues mentioned above were contributed to the

The international, multidisciplinary group of contributors to and reviewers of the Health guidelines are listed in the "Participant list" section of the Health Guidelines in Annex K. Special thanks are due to the chairpersons of the WHO-UNEP-WMO expert task force meeting held in Lima, Perú, in October 1998: The conference chair Dr Johann G. Goldammer, Max Planck Institut for Chemistry/Global Fire Monitoring Center, and the chairpersons of the two working groups, Dr Michael Brauer, University of British Columbia, and Dr Joel Levine, NASA Langley Research Center. Special contributions are gratefully acknowledged to those who provided the background papers compiled in this document, and to those who contributed to the success of the WHO-UNEP-WMO expert meeting:

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