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INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR VEGETATION SCIENCE

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The members of the **International Association for Vegetation Science** wish to express their deeply felt regret and sympathy with respect to the tragic loss of human lives resulting from the recent catastrophic wildfires that occurred in central Portugal.

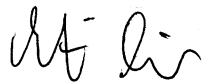
As we dedicate our scientific efforts to understanding vegetation patterns and dynamics in relation to human societies, we feel that we might, in consultation with your governmental agencies, help formulate some general principles that could be pursued in the future for the development of forestry in Portugal, with particular emphasis on public safety and human well-being. Examples of such policies might include the following.

- (1) Massive afforestation with either pines or eucalyptus is an historical inheritance that should be reversed. It should be replaced by gradual and enforced transformation of the

landscape so that it is more diverse, consists of smaller patches, and has an emphasis on ecosystems dominated by native species.

- (2) The over-accumulation of highly flammable litter in large regions of the landscape is the direct result of social changes in the recent decades that led to the abandonment of grazing and of traditional management of forest understory vegetation. The reintroduction of grazing, coordinated with other fire-control strategies, may be valuable management practices that should be considered.
- (3) Coordinated policies aiming at a more diverse and less flammable landscape, including forest and other ecosystems, should be pursued to overcome the difficulties in coherently managing a territory composed of small-holdings in these regions, which were mostly affected by the recent fires.

The IAVS is ready to collaborate with the government of Portugal to provide well-developed and scientifically sound recommendations for society-oriented ecosystem management.



Martin Diekmann, Prof. Dr.

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International Association for Vegetation Science