

Brazil faces worst water and electricity crisis in 91 years



Studies project a 14 percent reduction in energy produced by hydroelectric plants in ten years. | Photo: El Comercio

Brasilia, August 29 (RHC)-- Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro has acknowledged in a public address that the country is facing the worst water crisis in 91 years, and called on the population to save electricity and turn off lights in their homes.

"The problem is serious and some hydroelectric plants could even stop working (...) We are at the limit of the limit. Some will stop working if this crisis continues," said Bolsonaro.

Brazil has lost one-sixth of its areas covered by freshwater in three decades, going from 19.7 million hectares in 1991 to 16.6 million hectares in 2020, a reduction of 15.7 percentage points, with the Pantanal, the largest wetland on the planet on red alert, according to the Mapbiomas organization that studies changes in the territory through mapping.

Bolsonaro's statements come after the Minister of Economy, Paulo Guedes, questioned "what is the problem of energy being a little more expensive because it rains less."

The National Electric System Operator (ONS) of that country reported that the average capacity of reservoirs is at 23 percent with a risk of reduction to 21, compared to 42.3 in the same period in 2020.

This situation implies that the reservoirs responsible for 70 percent of Brazil's water generation capacity are at critical levels. In addition, between 2001 and 2021 Brazil reduced its dependence on hydropower for energy supply by one third, and they estimate that, within a decade, this source of generation will be reduced from the current 62 percent to 48 percent.

The ONS added that, if the drought persists and the downward trend in electricity generation continues, by next October there would be insufficient power generation to meet demand and a 7.5 percent increase in supply would be required to avoid blackouts.

The agency urged the Government to increase the use of thermoelectric plants and to consider importing energy from neighboring countries.

These phenomena have a direct impact on the Brazilian family economy, which has seen the price of electricity triple (16.07 percent) so far in 2021. In this regard, the National Electric Energy Agency warned of a possible increase of 16.68 percent in the price of electricity by 2022.

The coordinator of the Getulio Vargas Foundation's Consumer Price Index, André Braz, added that electricity affects approximately 4.5 of the family budget, and between 6.5 and 7 percent in families with lower income indexes.

The Bolsonaro Administration, questioned for its management of the Covid-19 pandemic, the privatization of state-owned companies, among other economic blunders, is planning measures to mitigate the impact of the crisis, such as the activation of thermal plants, which are more expensive and more polluting.

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