

Around 1,500 people evacuated amid raging wildfire in northeast Spain

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Firefighters extinguish the blaze in a burnt house in the Valle del Arlanza, in Santo Domingo de Silos near Burgos on July 25, 2022. (File photo by AFP)

Madrid, August 16 (RHC)-- A massive wildfire in drought-hit northeast Spain, which expanded alarmingly on Sunday, has forced the evacuation of eight villages and at least 1,500 people in Zaragoza province, according to local reports citing firefighters.

The "extremely violent" wildfire, which sparked in the town of Anon de Moncayo on Saturday, was raging in the Aragon region in the province of Zaragoza on Sunday, according to officials. It developed a 50-kilometer (31-mile) perimeter in less than 24 hours, the local forest chief was quoted as saying, burning through 8,000 hectares of the hilly forested landscape and forcing people to evacuate their homes and workplaces.

The head of the local Aragon government, Javier Lamban, was quoted as saying on Sunday that the situation was critical in the town of Añon de Moncayo and the priority for firefighters fighting the blaze was to protect human lives and villages. Some 300 firefighters and army personnel have been mobilized in the area to contain the wildfire.

Drought and high temperatures in the Mediterranean country have turned 2022 into the worst year of the century in terms of wildfire. The director of Natural Environment and Forestry Management in Zaragoza province described the current situation as "critical".

He expressed concern about the safety of the Moncayo Natural Park which has a diverse landscape ranging from glacier remains on the hilltop to deep forests of beech, kermes oak, oak, pine, and juniper trees on its mountain sides.

More than 2,000 people have died in Spain and Portugal in recent weeks amid record-breaking temperatures, accompanied by massive wildfires that have forced thousands of people to flee their homes. Spain witnessed several wildfires last month, including on the Canary Island as well as in Catalonia. Police later arrested a man suspected of starting the three blazes.

The Spanish Ministry for Ecological Transition has registered 43 large wildfires in the country this year so far, which have burned at least 500 hectares (1,250 acres). That is four times the amount of the previous year and a record for the last decade.

Scientists say human-induced climate change is making extreme weather events including heatwaves and droughts more frequent and more intense. They in turn increase the risk of fires, which emit climate-heating greenhouse gases.

Fires have also blazed in other European countries including France, Greece, and Portugal, making 2022 a record year for wildfire activity on the continent. In neighboring France, a forest fire in the southern Aveyron region has reignited, forcing people to flee.

Days ago around 1,000 firefighters were sent to the region to tackle the blaze. The blaze has burned thousands of hectares of pine forests. It came a month after the region was hit by another huge fire.

An early heat wave coupled with a sharp decrease in rainfall at the end of June led to this dire situation in the southern European countries of France and Spain.

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