

Three Chilean Firefighters Die Amid Efforts to Contain Wildfires



Santiago de Chile, January 25 (RHC)-- Wildfires continue to rage across a large area of land in Chile, with emergency teams working round the clock to put out the flames which have claimed the lives of three firefighters. The fire, which started last week, has so far destroyed some 155,000 hectares of land in Central and Southern Chile, forcing the evacuation of at least 4,000 people.

Thousands of emergency workers and firefighters are trying to extinguish the flames. Authorities say over 100 wildfires are raging across the country amid strong winds and a heat wave.

The south-central region of O'Higgins and Maule has been suffering the most, where the inferno destroyed homes, pasture and livestock. All affected areas are under a state of emergency, while several cities, including capital, Santiago, are shrouded in smoke.

On Tuesday, officials said three firefighters have died battling the flames and another three have been wounded. Dozens of vineyards have been affected by dozens of wildfires spreading across the country.

Chile's president Michelle Bachelet has ordered extra funds for tackling the flames, which she called the country's worst ever in the past 50 years. "The firefighters are doing all that is humanly possible," said the president, adding, however, that Chile has "practically exhausted its capacity to fight the blazes."

United States and Canada have provided planes and helicopters, while neighboring countries Spain, Peru and Mexico have also sent in aid and firefighters to help Chileans douse the wildfires.

Chile's forestry agency, CONAF, says the fires were caused by humans, but it remains to be determined whether they were set intentionally. According to CONAF, some 2,808 fires have hit Chilean forests since July, 2016, burning a total of about 550,000 acres (221,000 hectares) of land, a large spike over previous years.

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