

Guatemala Declares State of Calamity in 17 Drought-Hit Regions



Guatemala City, August 26 (Xinhua-RHC) -- Guatemalan President Otto Perez Molina on Monday signed a governmental decree declaring a state of calamity in 17 of the country's 22 departments, where as many as 200,000 rural and indigenous families whose livelihoods depend solely on farming are said to have been affected by a severe drought in those areas and a potential famine.

The decree, which requires legislative approval, would allow emergency assistance and humanitarian aid to be delivered to families in the affected regions which have been without rainfall for two months and suffered crop losses.

Agriculture Minister Elmer Lopez said at a press conference that the government needs some 60 million U.S. dollars over the next five months to cope with the food shortages.

There has been no rain since the beginning of June, an unusual phenomenon during the rainy season which normally runs from May through October. The lack of rain, coupled with heat waves, is a result of the El Niño phenomenon, analysts said.

Under the emergency aid plan that is expected to go into effect in October, families with children under the age of five would receive supplies of corn, beans and enriched flour, according to the agricultural official.

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