

Chile Declares State of Catastrophe Due to Wildfires

Santiago de Chile, Feb 5 (Prensa Latina) Chilean President Sebastián Piñera declared on Tuesday a "State of Constitutional Exception" in the southern regions of La Araucanía, Biobío and Los Ríos, as a result of the forest fires that devastate those areas.

This measure, which is interpreted as a state of catastrophe, was implemented in the entire region of Biobío with the exception of the municipalities of Concepción and Talcahuano, and all of Araucanía, except in the city of Temuco, its capital, while in Los Ríos it includes the municipalities of Mariquina and Panguipulli.

The Undersecretary of the Interior, Rodrigo Ubilla, in announcing this extraordinary measure from the La Moneda palace, informed of the designation, within the framework of the constitutional powers of the state of exception, of three high commanders of the Armed Forces as chiefs of national defense to face the emergency due to forest fires.

They are Rear Admiral Carlos Huber Vio, for the region of Biobío; Brigadier General Rodrigo Pino Riquelme, for La Araucanía and Brigadier General Joaquín Morales Burotto for the communes of Mariquina and Panguipulli in Los Ríos.

Ubilla said that this extreme measure seeks to strengthen the network of logistical support to deal with these disasters, and that these commanders will be responsible for 'controlling public order, operationally support the tasks of prevention, fire fighting and adopt all necessary measures to avoid risks to the population.

They should also ensure citizen tranquility and facilitate all the necessary work of evacuation and rescue of those affected by the fires, Ubilla said.

The fires gained strength last weekend and today numerous disasters are still active in large areas of the south of the country, especially in Araucanía.

More than 8,000 hectares of forests and pastures have already been burned by flames, dozens of homes have been destroyed and hundreds of people evacuated, according to reports from the National Forestry Corporation (CONAF) and the National Emergency Office of the Ministry of the Interior (ONEMI).

Chile faces a complicated and unusual situation, because in the normally hot north, the so-called altiplanic winter has caused flooding and flooding of numerous rivers, resulting in three deaths and a girl missing.

In contrast, in the south of the territory, usually cold even in the summer, high temperatures have set historical records.

In statements to the media, specialist Luis Salazar, from Chile's Meteorological Directorate, explained that in the north of the country during the rest of the week the rains should continue, although not so intense, in the areas of the Andes mountain range, which are the cause of the strong floods.

But he added that in the northern regions of Arica, Tarapacá and Antofagasta those conditions should be maintained at least until March, when the summer begins to give way, and temperatures will be lower than usual, a product of cloud cover.

According to the meteorologist, the heat wave that has affected the center and south of the country is expected to decrease in the next few days, in the order of four to six degrees.

If this happens, forest fires could also be reduced, which are stimulated by high temperatures, the dryness of the environment and strong winds, although the negligence of people is also a trigger according to warn authorities who constantly call to increase all precautions.

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