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Information Bulletin no. 1 South America: Forest Fires

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Information Bulletin N° 1	Date of issue: 24 August 2019
Date of disaster: Ongoing since August 2019	Point of contact: Pabel Angeles: Disaster Management Coordinator - South America focal point: pabel.angeles@ifrc.org
National Societies currently involved: Brazilian Red Cross (BRC), Bolivian Red Cross (BRC), Paraguayan Red Cross (PRC) and Peruvian Red Cross (PRC).	

***This bulletin is being issued for information only;
it reflects the current situation and details available at this time.***

The situation

In recent years, forest fires have become an emerging and continuous danger in South America. These fires cause damage to the ecosystem, biodiversity, livelihoods with a strong impact on communities in these areas and others affected by the effects. The number of forest fires to date in 2019 has significantly surpassed the figures for the same period in the past four years.

From January to August of this year, among the South American countries most affected by an increase in the number of forest fires are Brazil with 75,336 (85% increase); Venezuela with 26,491 (19% increase); Bolivia with 17,154 (114% increase); Peru with 5,681, (104% increase); Paraguay with 9,861 (7% increase). The occurrence of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) has contributed to a decrease in rainfall in several locations, which in turn cause droughts and significant water reduction in forests. The illegal burning of land and crops complicates this situation and augments the risk of forest fires.



Regional Impact

- In the past two weeks, forest fires have been registered mainly in Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru, covering large areas of forest and fields. Recent attention has been placed on the forest fires in the Amazon, a vast region of central and northern South America that comprises the rainforest of the Amazon River Basin. The

Amazon is considered the global lung as it produces 20% of the oxygen on the planet, in addition to having 50% of flora varieties in the world and extensive fauna.

- To date, there have not been registered human losses or injuries due to this year’s forest fires. However, these fires have affected biodiversity, fauna, flora and generated a negative impact on the ecosystem.
- The current risk is the spread of these forest fires in Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru, which would increase the dangers to native populations, indigenous peoples, other inhabitants of these regions and nearby communities. South American countries are joining efforts to control and mitigate the impact of the current forest fires.
- The impact on the Amazon can cause an alteration in humidity and rainfall levels in the region, which can lead to increased areas of drought.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

National Societies’ actions



Brazil

Context	Brazilian Red Cross (CVB)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fires have affected a large part of the Brazilian Amazon in the states of Amazonas and Acre and have spread and affected the states of Mato Grosso do Sul and Paraná. The country’s largest city Sao Paulo also been affected by the smoke. The magnitude of the disaster could also threaten adjacent areas of Peru, Bolivia and Paraguay. • On 23 August, the President of the Republic of Brazil issued a decree authorizing the armed forces to carry out actions to respond to the forest fires in the affected areas of the Brazilian Amazon. • Since 22 August, satellite records register 9,507 new forest fires, mainly in the Amazon basin. • Compared to the 2018 figures, from the beginning of the year to this date, Brazil has registered an 85% increase in the number of fires. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on communication with the Brazilian Red Cross, forest fires have affected areas of tropical forest, but to date there has been no reported direct impact on the population, nor deaths and injuries. • The Brazilian Red Cross, its national headquarters and branches are monitoring and remain alert to the issue of forest fires. • The National Society maintains communication and coordination with government authorities.



Bolivia

Context	Bolivian Red Cross (BRC)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest fires have most affected the Santa Cruz department with Robore as one of the most affected areas. On 17 August, the Government decreed in Departmental Disaster, to mobilize human, technical and logistical resources for the attention of the forest fire. • The President of the Republic of Brazil has reported that 70% of the outbreaks of forest fires have been controlled with the mobilization of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bolivian Red Cross has been monitoring the situation and is in contact with the Santa Cruz branch, which has been coordinating with the authorities and conducting evaluations.

1,000 firefighters, police and army personnel and 3 helicopters.

- 5 houses have been destroyed with no reports of deaths or injuries. Community evacuation has been necessary. Smoke has affected other departments.
- Bolivian authorities remain on alert for further fires.



Paraguay

Context	Paraguayan Red Cross Society (PRC)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• On 22 August, the Senate approved an emergency declaration for Alto Paraguay and Boquerón departments, due to the effect of forest fires in the area that borders with Bolivia and Brazil. The National Emergency Secretariat (NES) and the National Forestry Institute are in charge of actions to respond to the forest fires.• The NES reports that there are currently no active fire hotspots and continues to monitor the situation. Resources and personnel have been repositioned.• The Ministry of Health has alerted its health centres in the area with 60 medical attention services provided to children and adults for respiratory problems and conjunctivitis, as a consequence of the dense smoke.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• According to coordination and information with the Paraguayan Red Cross, to date no deaths have been reported.• The Paraguayan Red Cross maintains contact with its referents in the area and with State authorities.• Go report published on 23 August 23.



Perú

Context	Peruvian Red Cross (PRC)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The National Institute of Civil Defence (INDECI) has reported that no currently active forest fires are generating an emergency situation.• From 17 July, 128 forest fires were reported in the country, mainly in the departments of Ayacucho, Cusco, Amazonas and Madre de Dios.• The Hydrometeorology Service is monitoring air quality in the departments of Madre de Dios, the department that borders Brazil and Bolivia. No damage has been reported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Peruvian Red Cross has been monitoring the situation.• Contact is maintained with the scientific entities and the National Response System and the Country Humanitarian Team.

Actions

- National and international situational monitoring.
- Information and deployment alert for a Regional Intervention Team (RIT) member.
- Continuous monitoring by the regional disaster management (DM) coordinator for South America, IFRC's Country Cluster Support Team (CCST) in Lima – Peru and Buenos Aires - Argentina.
- Coordination between the IFRC's Disaster and Crisis Department in the Regional Office for the Americas and country clusters.
- Sending of informational messages by the DM focal points.
- Direct contact is maintained with focal points of the involved National Societies.
- For the time being, the National Societies have not requested support from the IFRC; future requests are not ruled out depending on the evolution of the emergency.

Contact information

For further information, specifically related to this operation please contact:

In the IFRC Americas Regional Office:

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How we work

All IFRC assistance seeks to adhere to the **Code of Conduct** for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) in Disaster Relief and the **Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response (Sphere)** in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. The IFRC's vision is to inspire, **encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities** by National Societies, with a view to **preventing and alleviating human suffering**, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

The IFRC's work is guided by Strategy 2020 which puts forward three strategic aims:



Save lives.
protect livelihoods,
and strengthen recovery
from disaster and crises.



Enable **healthy**
and **safe** living.



Promote **social inclusion**
and a culture of
non-violence and **peace**.
