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Information bulletin

Chile: Wildfires

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Information Bulletin

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6 January 2012

This bulletin is being issued for information only, and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The Chilean Red Cross, with the support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), is currently assessing the extent of the emergency. External assistance is not yet required.

[<Click here to view the map of the affected area, or here for detailed contact information>](#)



Multiple wildfires across Chile have affected over 45,800 hectares. Although many of them have already been contained, damages are still unclear. Source: Chilean Red Cross

The Chilean authorities are currently combating multiple wildfires across the regions of Biobío, Maule and Magallanes that have affected more than 45,800 hectares of land. Currently, there are 20 active fires, 24 contained and 7 extinguished. Although the exact level of damage is still unclear, an estimated 200 homes have been affected and 600 persons have been preventively evacuated. In response to the state of red alert, the Chilean Red Cross (ChRC) activated their branches and volunteers in the affected areas. The National Society is working in coordination with the National Office of Emergency of the Interior Ministry (Oficina Nacional de Emergencia del Ministerio del Interior – ONEMI) to complete damage assessments, and to assist affected families with psychosocial support and first aid care. The ChRC has a permanent rotation of 11 volunteers in the commune¹ of Quillón (Biobío region) and 7 volunteers in the commune of Cauquenes (Maule region).

¹ *Communes* (comuna in Spanish) in Chile correspond to the third-level administrative division of the country, similar to municipalities. The country is divided into 15 regions, 54 provinces and 346 *comunas*.

The situation

On 2 January 2012, the Chilean authorities declared a red alert as they combated the spreading of more than 50 wildfires affecting over 45,800 hectares. At the moment six provinces in three regions of Chile are under red alert: the provinces of Última Esperanza (Magallanes region), Biobío, Concepción, Ñuble (Biobío region), Cauquenes and Linares (Maule region). Although the exact level of affectation is still unclear, some 200 homes have been affected and 600 persons have been evacuated preventively. A 75-year-old man lost his life after refusing to evacuate his home.

The first fire started on 27 December in the Torres del Paine National Park, located in the Magallanes region in Chile's far south. Some days later eight fires started in Biobío near a cellulose plant, situation which led authorities to believe that the fires were caused deliberately. The current season's high temperatures, strong winds and three years of drought have worsened the situation. At present, 20 wildfires are active, 24 contained and 7 extinguished. As a result, the Chilean government has requested international assistance to combat the fires and brigadiers from Argentina and Uruguay are working in Torres del Paine, while the government of Brazil offered an airplane capable of carrying 80,000 litres of water. More than 1,000 persons are currently working to contain the fires.

Biobío region: The National Forest Corporation (Cooperación Nacional Forestal - CONAF) reported that some 24,800 hectares have been affected, mostly in the area of Pichiqueime in the communes of Florida, Quillón and Ranquil. The commune of Quillón had 20 active fires, although the majority of them have now been contained with the support of helicopters and airplanes. As the fire spread into Nueva Aldea, commune of Ranquil, some 495 persons were evacuated. Authorities have reported that 160 homes have been destroyed and that around 400 farmers have been affected by the destruction of 178 hectares of vineyards and fruit trees, 125 hectares of cereals, 67 greenhouses and 640 farm animals. On 3 January, there were 222 persons in the collective centre in Chillán, and 195 persons in the collective centre in Quillón. However, most households have moved with relatives and friends, prompting the close of the collective centre in Chillán, while the one in Quillón is sheltering only 19 persons.

Maule region: 6,605 hectares have been destroyed by the fires in this region, affecting 200 families and destroying 30 homes. In addition, some 200 persons in the commune of Cauquenes have been affected by the interruption of electricity supply, which is also affecting the availability of water as most homes depend on water pumps to carry the water from wells. Thus far, no families have taken refuge in collective centres in the commune of Cauquenes.

The Chilean government announced that it will declare the affected communes as "zones of agricultural emergency" to facilitate the mobilization of resources for the recovery of livelihoods in Biobío. Furthermore, the Ministry of Housing stated that the reconstruction of some 220 destroyed homes is expected to start before March 2012. Moreover, ONEMI has dispatched hygiene kits, sanitation equipment, water, food items, blankets and mattresses for people in collective centres as well as for the workers containing the fire.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

In line with the red alert declared on 2 January, the Chilean Red Cross (ChRC) activated their volunteers and branches in the affected areas, particularly in the commune of Quillón. Under the request of ONEMI, the National Society assisted affected persons evacuated into collective centres and is now completing damage and needs assessments.



Volunteers of the ChRC are supporting affected families in collective centres with first aid care and psychosocial support. Source: ChRC

In addition, after a technical meeting with ONEMI and municipal authorities in Quillón, it was agreed that the ChRC would lead the humanitarian assistance carried out by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). To support the work of volunteers and staff in the affected areas of Biobío, the National Society has also deployed a National Intervention Team (NIT) composed of four general NIT members, four water and sanitation NIT members, and two health NIT members specialized in psychosocial support and emergency health.

- **Assistance in collective centres:** The National Society has dispatched 40 hygiene kits and 6 family food parcels to the commune of Quillón. In addition, volunteers assisted with the cleaning and refurbishing of sanitation facilities. On 3 January, when collective centres were actively in use, volunteers carried out recreational activities with children. The ChRC is also organizing a psychosocial support activity in coordination with World Vision with those persons remaining in the centres.
- **Damage assessments:** After meeting with authorities from the communes of Quillón, Ñipas and Cauquenes it was determined that the National Society could assist with damage assessments. It is still unclear the level of affectation caused by the wildfires, as many families took refuge with relatives and friends since the start of the emergency or soon after. Volunteers are currently completing field visits with the support of 6 vehicles.
- **Evacuations and first aid care:** On 3 January, the ChRC was requested to support evacuations in Coronel del Maule due to the approaching fire. A search and rescue team from the Curicó branch was placed on alert; however, the forest fires are mostly contained at the moment.
- **Fire containment:** Three water pumps (with capacity to pump 500 litres per minute) were dispatched to support governmental authorities to contain the fires. The pumps are being used to fill the air tankers in use in Quillón.

In addition to the National Intervention Team members deployed to the affected areas, the ChRC is keeping a permanent rotation of 11 volunteers in Quillón (Biobío region) and 7 volunteers in Cauquenes (Maule region).

Contact information

For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:

- **In Chile:** Yolanda Muñoz Conte, director general of the Chilean Red Cross; phone: +562 777 1448; and email: yolanda.munoz@cruzroja.cl.
- **IFRC regional representation:** Gustavo Ramirez, regional representative for the Southern Cone and Brazil; phone: +541 1495 17420; and email: gustavo.ramirez@ifrc.org.
- **IFRC Americas zone:** Jorge Zequeira, PADRU coordinator; phone: +507 317 3050; and email: jorge.zequeira@ifrc.org
- **In Geneva:** Pablo Medina, operations quality assurance senior officer; phone: +41 22 730 4381; fax: +41 22 733 0395; and email: pablo.medina@ifrc.org

**For Performance and Accountability
(planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting enquiries)**

- **In IFRC Americas zone:** Jane Grimshaw, PMER manager; phone: +507 317 3050; and email: jane.grimshaw@ifrc.org



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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 (NGOs) in Disaster Relief and the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster 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.

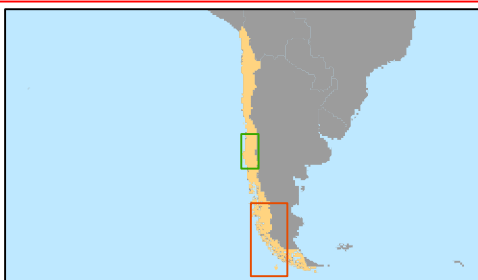
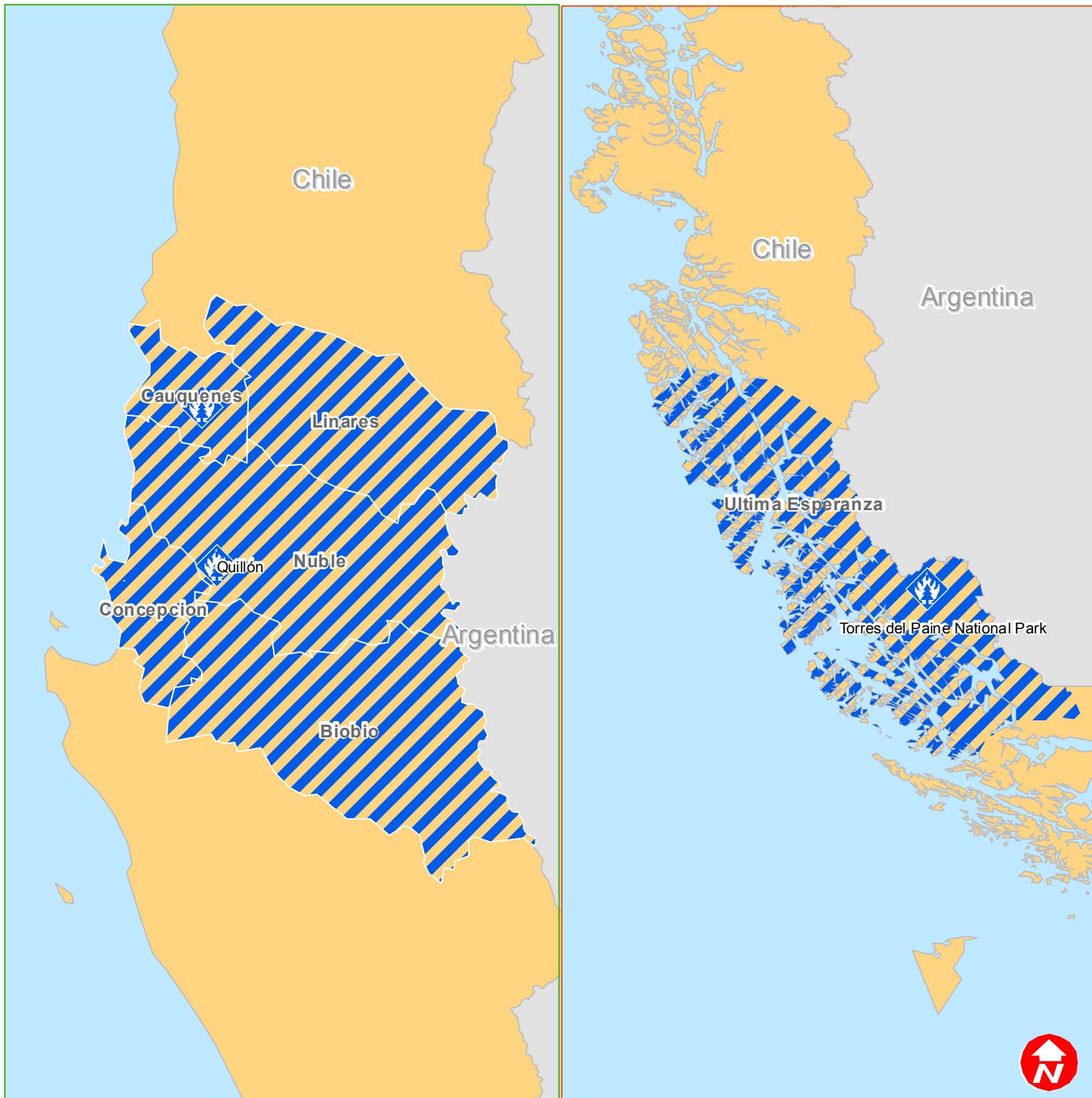


The IFRC's work is guided by *Strategy 2020* which puts forward three strategic aims:

1. Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disaster and crises.
 2. Enable healthy and safe living.
 3. Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace.
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Main places affected by fires



Affected provinces