



Death Toll Hits 44 in Brazilian Flooding



Brasilia, December 27 (RHC)-- The death toll for flooding and landslides in southeastern Brazil has reached 44, with thousands of people still displaced, officials say.

According to Civil Defense officials in Espirito Santo, 27 people, including eight on Thursday, lost their lives in the state. A total of 61,379 people were forced to leave their homes.

Authorities from neighboring Minas Gerais state reported a total of 17 deaths since the flooding started in October. They also said that 4,150 people were forced to evacuate their homes.

In both states, heavy rain has flooded entire neighborhoods, destroying several bridges, causing mudslides and leading to the closure of several stretches of road. Rain continues to fall in Espirito Santo and Minas Gerais, and is expected to continue over the next few days.

Meanwhile, the Brazilian government strove on Thursday to speed up the flow of federal disaster aid.

A presidential decree issued on Thursday calls for federal aid for natural disasters to be released faster and require less bureaucracy.

The decree, which is temporary and needs to be approved by congress before it can become a law, makes it possible for states and cities to apply for federal aid without having to first present a reconstruction project to the federal government.



The decree was published after President Dilma Rousseff toured the flood-ravaged state of Espirito Santo, in southeast Brazil, where more than a week of rain has destroyed many homes.

Army soldiers and the National Security Force are already in Espirito Santo to help with relief and rescue efforts. The state of Minas Gerais has yet to request federal aid, authorities said.