

French residents angry over failed warning system in flood-hit regions



Paris, October 17 (RHC)-- Residents in the flood-hit region of Aude in southwestern France have expressed anger about what they see as a failure on the part of authorities to warn people as the flood waters were rising on Sunday night.

Residents said on Tuesday that the region was only placed on red alert at Vigilance Rouge at 6:00 am on Monday when the heaviest rains had already passed and rivers had burst banks.

The high water moved with violent force, tearing bridges away from roadways and flooding homes, as seen in video and photos from the scene. Television pictures showed churning, muddy rivers that had uprooted trees, knocked over concrete power pylons and tore up roads in Aude.

Prime Minister Edouard Philippe flew to the disaster zone to meet with emergency service personnel. One resident of Trebes, whose house was flooded, showed his anger during a visit by Philippe on Monday evening, asking why people had not been warned in advance.

"There was a moment when you have to say 'OK this could be dangerous'," he said. "Can't keep an eye

on the River Aude and send the firefighters into the street to tell people 'Get out of your homes, we are evacuating you'? Could you not do that? "

The mayor Trebes Eric Ménassi responded, "The tragedy that we have been through was impossible to predict and overwhelming."

National emergency services spokesman Michael Bernier said 13 people had been killed and one person was still missing, while thousands were being evacuated from the area. A spokesman for the Interior Ministry said there is a chance of the death toll rising.

The worst hit regions of Aude, a region near the medieval hilltop city of Carcassonne, are villages of Conques-Sur-Orbiel and Villardonnell. Water has been reported as high as the first-floor windows of some homes.

Schools reportedly have still remained closed across the Aude region sits d about 25 miles north of the border with Spain. Some 1,500 homes remain without power, with several parts of the region still considered dangerous due to the flood waters.

The Hospital Center of Carcassonne canceled all noncritical operations, citing road conditions and communications problems. Authorities in the Aude warned motorists not to risk driving on submerged roads and told people to avoid drinking tap water.

Vigicrues, the government organization that monitors floods said it was still possible rivers could burst their banks. The region is on red alert and it is hoped the flood waters will have sufficiently receded within the next several days. A red alert means the public are advised to avoid travel and take extreme precaution.

The Red Cross has launched an appeal for donations to help them deal with the "considerable damage." "From the very beginning, the teams of the Aude Red Cross and neighboring departments have mobilized to ensure their mission of support to the local population," said a statement from the Red Cross.

As the death toll rose and the extent of the damage became clear, President Emmanuel Macron decided to hold off on an already-delayed reshuffle of his cabinet.

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