

Death toll from Chile forest fire rises to 16



Santiago, April 14, (RHC), -- The death toll from the massive forest fire in Chile's port city of Valparaíso has risen to 16, with more than 500 houses destroyed and 10,000 people evacuated since the fire broke out on Saturday in the hills surrounding Valparaíso, authorities said Sunday.

Valparaíso's Emergency Committee said the death toll had risen from 11 to 16, adding that the fire has destroyed some 756 hectares including forest and high parts of the urban sector of Valparaíso, some 110 km west of Santiago.

Driven by strong Pacific coast winds, the fire has gutted more than 300 hectares of hilly residential neighborhoods, local authorities said.

Chilean President, Michelle Bachelet, arrived in Valparaíso on Sunday morning after declaring a state of emergency in the city, which is famous for its UNESCO-listed historic center.

Bachelet came to the city to survey the damage of the huge fire. In a message sent from the seat of Valparaíso's regional government, she communicated the situation and presented a humanitarian action plan to help those affected.

Although the fire is partially under control, it is feared that the seats of the fire that have not been

extinguished might spread if the wind becomes stronger.

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