

Thousands protest in Spain's Valencia over handling of deadly floods

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About 80 people are still missing and people are angry at the government after the deadliest deluge in decades. Civil groups and unions protest against the management of the emergency response to the deadly floods in eastern Spain, in Valencia, Spain

Madrid, November 10 (RHC)-- Thousands of people have demonstrated in Spain's eastern city of Valencia to protest the authorities' handling of one of Europe's deadliest natural disasters in decades and call for accountability.

Large crowds gathered in the central part of the city on Saturday night, with some clashing with riot police in front of Valencia's city hall. Police were filmed using batons to beat back protesters who were

marching towards the seat of the regional government.

In Spain, regional governments are charged with handling civilian protection and can ask for extra resources from the national government in Madrid. The current regional leader is Carlos Mazon of the conservative Popular Party, who is facing calls for resignation after his administration failed to issue flood alerts to citizens until after the water was filling people's homes.

Mazon has defended his handling of the crisis, arguing that the magnitude of the crisis was unforeseeable and that authorities in Madrid failed to notify his administration adequately and on time.

But Spain's weather agency issued a red alert, the highest level of warning, for bad weather at approximately 7:30 a.m. local time (06:30GMT) on Tuesday morning, more than 12 hours earlier than Mazon's administration finally sent out alerts to people's cellphones.

The regional leader is also facing heavy criticism due to what people viewed as a slow and unorganised response to the natural disaster, which has killed at least 220 people as of Saturday.

In many of the hardest-hit areas on Valencia's southern outskirts, volunteers were the first to help people, with the government taking days to fully mobilise the thousands of police forces and soldiers who were sent to assist the flood-stricken.

"You killed us!" some of the protesters wrote on their protest banners on Saturday, with others chanting for Mazon's resignation and some leaving muddied boots outside the council building to show their fury.

"We want to show our indignation and anger over the poor management of this disaster which has affected so many people," said Anna Oliver, president of Accio Cultural del Pais Valenciano, one of about 30 groups that organised the protest, according to the Reuters news agency.

There were also protests in Valencia earlier this week, and people threw mud and chanted "murderers" when King Felipe and Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez visited a suburb of the city.

At least 212 of the deaths were recorded in the eastern Valencia region, and nearly 80 people are still believed to be missing in the deadliest deluge in a European country since floods in Portugal in 1967 killed about 500.

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