

Brazilian government finally begins fighting Amazon fires, sending troops to area



Brasilia, August 25 (RHC)-- A spokeswoman of President Jair Bolsonaro has confirmed that the Brazilian president authorized the military to intervene to fight raging fires in seven states of the Amazon, amid an international outcry and urging requests of help from governors of the affected states.

More than 80,000 blazes have been registered over the past week across Brazil by the National Institute of Space Research (INPE) which keeps track of the nation's fires via satellite images, the number is the highest reached in seven years.

The Defense Ministry posted a video on Saturday showing two planes dumping water on the fires. But outside of the state of Rondonia, the government has not yet provided any operational detail for the other states.

The government said in a briefing that 44,000 troops were present in the north of the country, but it did not say how many would be used, where and to do what.

Bolsonaro's reaction comes days after the wildfires started devastating the forest and at a moment when the Group of Seven (G-7) countries who met in France, expressed concerns over the catastrophe and the alarming observation that Bolsonaro's administration was not doing enough to prevent or control the flames.

When the destruction of the world's largest rainforest started last week, he had told reporters that this was the time of the year of the "queimada" or burns, when farmers use fire to clear land.

After blaming the fires on drought, he went on saying the environmental non-governmental organizations were behind the fires because they wanted to hit him after they lost international financing. Bolsonaro, however, provided no evidence for his allegations, and finally said that governors are "accomplices", as they do not resolve the situation.

The Amazon is seen as essential in the fight against climate change thanks to the vast amounts of carbon dioxide it absorbs. The largest tropical forest in the world also provides 20 percent of the planet's oxygen and is home for an estimated million indigenous people and three million species of plants and animals.

Experts said the fires were caused by human activity, with farmers and ranchers deforesting and then burning the land.

Brazilian climate scientist Carlos Nobre said he worries if 20-25 percent of the ecosystem is destroyed that the Amazon could reach a tipping point, after which it would enter a self-sustaining period of dieback as the forest converts to savannah. Nobre warned that it is not far off with already 15-17 percent of the rainforest having been destroyed.

Right-wing Colombian President Ivan Duque said on Sunday he would seek a conservation pact with other Amazonian countries. "Colombia wants to lead a pact, a conservation pact, between the countries that have Amazon territory," Duque said: "We must understand the protection of our Mother Earth and our Amazon is a duty, a moral duty."

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