Wildfires kill at least 30 in Portugal and Spain

By: Andrei Khalip and Raquel Castillo
Monday, October 16, 2017

LISBON/MADRID (Reuters) - At least 30 people died in wildfires raging through parched farmlands and forests in Portugal and neighbouring Spain on Sunday and Monday, officials said.

Authorities said they were still battling 145 blazes in Portugal - still recovering from its deadliest fire on record in June - and another 100 in Spain. Portugal's government asked for international help and declared a state of emergency in territory north of the Tagus river - about half of its landmass.

"We are facing new (weather) conditions... In an era of climate change, such disasters are becoming reality all over the world," Portugal's Interior Minister, Constanca Urbano de Sousa, said citing the fires burning in California.

Flames ripped across countryside left tinder-dry by an unusually hot summer and early autumn, fanned by strong winds as remnants of ex-Hurricane Ophelia brushed the Iberian coast.

The weekend's fires had killed at least 27 people and injured more than 50 in Portugal, civil protection service spokeswoman Patricia Gaspar said.

In June, 64 people died in a huge forest fire in central Portugal. The government has been criticised for a slow, inefficient response and a lack of fire-prevention policies.

Three people died in Spain's Galicia region - two of them women found inside a burnt-out car, the third a man in his seventies, killed as he tried to save his farm animals, media reported.

Most of the fires in Galicia were started deliberately, the head of the regional government, Alberto Nunez Feijoo, said in a radio interview.

Spain's Interior Minister Juan Ignacio Zoido said some of those responsible had already been identified. They could face up to 20 years in jail if convicted, police said. At least one person was arrested in Portugal for allegedly starting a fire.

(Reporting by Andrei Khalip; Editing by Andrew Heavens)

Link: https://www.thestar.com.my