

Beat: Politics

Official statement by the Spanish Prime Minister to the affected by the DANA

It has caused more than 200 deaths

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USPA NEWS - The President of the Spanish Government, Pedro Sánchez, addressed the public on Saturday to inform them about the situation in the areas affected by the DANA, which has caused more than 200 deaths and considerable material damage. This was his full speech:

Good morning! I am appearing before the media after the fourth meeting of the Crisis Committee derived from the DANA by the Government of Spain and after having spoken with the President of the Generalitat of the Valencian Community, Mr. Mazón. I would also like to address the public to inform them of the situation in the areas affected by the DANA and also to report on the actions that the Government of Spain is taking to help the municipalities and the autonomous communities to manage this terrible tragedy, particularly in the Valencian Community.

And I do so knowing that at this very moment there are still dozens of people looking for their loved ones and hundreds of homes mourning the loss of a family member, a friend or a neighbour. And I want to express to all of them our deepest affection and assure them that the Government of Spain and the entire State, at its various administrative levels, is with all of them. As I said at the beginning of the crisis, the Government of Spain is going to mobilise all the resources that are necessary, for as long as it takes, to help them in this tragic situation.

This week's DANA has caused the biggest natural disaster in the recent history of our country and is already the second flood that has claimed the most victims in Europe so far this century. The Government of Spain, as it could not be otherwise, is assisting the regional authorities in everything they have asked for and in turn is acting on the ground in five clear priorities.

The first, saving lives. In the last 48 hours we have deployed more than 2,500 military personnel, 1,800 national police officers and 2,700 civil guards in the province of Valencia, as well as several groups specialised in rescue and underwater activities, who are giving their best to rescue survivors, guarantee security and restore normality to the streets. These personnel are being assisted by some 450 soldiers in their home bases, by digital equipment and state-of-the-art satellites, and by a fleet of 400 specialised vehicles, 30 helicopters and fifty drones and boats.

In total, we are talking about the largest deployment of personnel from the State Security Forces and Corps, from the Armed Forces, that has ever been made in our country in times of peace. A deployment that has already carried out 4,800 rescues and has helped more than 30,000 people in homes, on roads and in flooded industrial estates.

Unfortunately, the magnitude of this natural disaster makes these numbers insufficient, because we know that aid is taking a long time to reach many places, that there are still houses and garages blocked, towns flooded and many people helpless. That is why I am pleased that President Mazón has decided to increase his request for military personnel from 500 to 5,000 and I announce to you, as I have conveyed to him in the call I made before appearing before the media, that the Government of Spain will proceed immediately to send them. Today, 4,000 additional troops from the military units will arrive in the province of Valencia and the remaining thousand military troops will arrive first thing tomorrow. In total, 5,000 more in the next few hours.

And I have also ordered the deployment of an amphibious ship from the Navy equipped with accommodation, operating rooms, helicopters and a fleet of support vehicles that will arrive at the port of Valencia in the next few hours. And I also inform you that I have ordered, as I have also communicated to President Mazón, the deployment today of 5,000 additional national police officers and civil guards, doubling the number of those already sent to add up to a total of 10,000 officers, both Civil Guard and National Police, deployed in the areas affected by this DANA.

And I want to reiterate to the citizens of the Valencian Community and to the whole of Spanish society what from the first moment, each and every one of the members of the Crisis Committee of the Government of Spain, and I personally, have conveyed to the Government of the Generalitat of the Valencian Community and to President Mazón. And that is that the central Government is ready to help. If it needs more resources, it should ask for them. There is no need to prioritize some municipalities over others or to prioritize

tasks. Priority is given when there is a lack of resources. And that is not the case. It should not happen. Therefore, if the Valencian Community requires more personnel, machinery, financing or technical advice, what it has to do is ask for it and it will be supplied, as is being done, immediately, as we are going to do with the 5,000 soldiers requested just a few minutes ago.

The Valencian authorities know the terrain better than anyone. Their technicians, their firefighters, their police, their public servants are there, they are working, they live there, they know what needs to be done and if they do not have sufficient resources to do it, they should ask the General Administration of the State again. This way of proceeding that combines the capillarity and proximity of the local and autonomous administrations with the collective power of the central Government, has allowed our country to successfully overcome numerous natural disasters and previous crises that we all have in our heads and in our hearts. And it has to do it again. It will do it again.

Our second priority is to recover and identify the bodies of the deceased. And we have to do it quickly, but also with all the guarantees and with all the dignity that the victims and their families deserve. Over the last 48 hours, the State Security Forces and Corps and the Armed Forces have inspected thousands of garages, homes, riverbeds, roads and have carried out the location and removal of 211 fatal victims. And to speed up this process we have deployed 20 corpse removal teams, each made up of forensic experts, psychologists, police officers, scientists; several mobile morgues and a Disaster Victim Identification Unit of the General Commissariat of the National Police. And of course, these search and recovery efforts will continue in the coming days - day and night, night and day - for as long as necessary, until all missing citizens are located.

And along with these two priorities, the third priority in this crisis is to restore basic supplies and essential services where they have been affected, and we at the Spanish Government are aware that this is one of the priorities for returning to normality in many of the affected municipalities. The DANA has caused severe damage - as the victims know - to bridges, roads, railway lines, power and telecommunications lines, dams, sewage treatment plants and other infrastructures that were not designed to withstand the winds nor, logically, the levels of rain recorded on Tuesday afternoon.

Since then, the Public Administrations have carried out repair work tirelessly in close collaboration with the private sector, which I would like to thank for its commitment and solidarity. I believe that we have made very notable progress, although there is still much to do. In the last 48 hours, power has been restored to 94% of affected homes, from 240,000 points of incidence to less than 14,000, and approximately half of the almost 550,000 telephone lines that were cut have been restored, with the remainder expected to be restored over the weekend. And numerous portable devices have been installed to provide Wi-Fi and coverage to areas that are currently cut off.

To facilitate the reactivation of transport infrastructure, we have deployed 300 specialists from the General Directorate of Roads, more than 2,000 damaged cars and trucks have already been removed, as well as hundreds of tons of mud and debris. In addition, tunnel cleaning, temporary detours and viaducts and bridges have been started. And thanks to this, the teams have been able to restore traffic on the V-30, on the V-31 of the Mediterranean corridor, and offer at least emergency traffic on the section of the A-3 between Cuenca and Valencia. And at the same time, as the citizens of the affected areas know, high-speed trains between Barcelona and Valencia have been reestablished, as well as the C5 and C6 commuter lines, and freight rail traffic between the port of Valencia, Aragon and Catalonia; an essential connection to guarantee the arrival of supplies to the area, as we can all imagine.

Repair work has also begun on the Chiva and Torrent railway tunnels that connect Valencia with Madrid, and on the C1 and C2 suburban lines, which we hope to complete over the course of this weekend. And, in parallel, a forestry brigade has been deployed to clean the riverbeds and the most affected banks, and to help the technicians of the Júcar Hydrographic Confederation to repair the damaged water infrastructure. This unit will have 300 personnel over the course of this weekend as well.

And measures have been adopted to facilitate the arrival and distribution of food - which is one of the main concerns that we public authorities have - and of basic necessities among the population: lifting restrictions on the driving rest times of transporters, using the Army to reinforce the logistics lines, and distributing thousands of litres of bottled water and food rations among the population. In addition, five water treatment plants, water tanks, 200 portable latrines and 4,000 tool, kitchen and hygiene kits have been made available to the Generalitat of the Valencian Community.

We are aware, in any case, that, despite all this enormous effort, there are places that are still overwhelmed by mud and debris, and that suffer from a lack of basic services and supplies. And, for that reason, the state teams will continue to work tirelessly until aid has reached everyone and normality returns to the streets. That is our commitment and we are going to make it a reality.

Our fourth priority is and will be to guarantee safety on the streets. An issue that affects us first-hand and that is why we have announced that we are going to double the number of Civil Guard and National Police officers on the streets to guarantee that safety. As you know, Spain is one of the safest countries in the world, with one of the lowest crime rates, and we are also a caring and responsible country that, in times of crisis like this, responds with thousands of volunteers, as we are seeing, with donation campaigns, with civil obedience. This is how it is, and also on this occasion it is being the case for a large majority of the Valencian people.

A people that is giving everything to help their relatives, their neighbours, their loved ones, all those affected in an altruistic and committed way. And from here, and on behalf of all Spaniards, I want to thank them and convey to all of them our admiration and our support.

Unfortunately, there are some people who are taking advantage of the situation to loot and commit criminal acts and, therefore, as I said before, the State Security Forces and Corps have already made more than 82 arrests, and will continue to patrol the streets in greater numbers to guarantee order and the law, and to ensure that order and the law are respected.

And our fifth and final priority is to put in place all the necessary economic resources to begin, as soon as possible, the compensation and recovery of the territories affected by this DANA, with the autonomous communities thinking about the municipalities, the homes, the workers and the companies, from the largest to the smallest. And, for that reason, I inform you that next Tuesday in the Council of Ministers we are going to approve the declaration of an area seriously affected by a civil protection emergency for those places in the Valencian Community, Castilla-La Mancha, Andalusia, Catalonia and Aragon that have been hit the hardest. And that we will create an Interministerial Commission that will work to promote, urgently and quickly, the reconstruction and economic relaunch of these areas.

And, furthermore, I inform you that, from the Ministry of Finance, from the First Vice-Presidency of the Government of Spain, we are going to authorize the Government of the Valencian Community the possibility of making all the urgent expenses it needs without any limit on resources. And that 100 temporary civil servant positions have already been created, who will join the Government sub-delegations, the Government Delegation in the Valencian Community starting this Monday to speed up the entire process of aid to those affected by this tragedy.

I also inform you that we are in communication with the European Commission and that we have begun the process to request aid from the European Solidarity Fund and the use of other community support resources from the European Union. And I would like, at this point, of course, to thank the immense messages of solidarity that we have received from all the authorities, from all the institutions, both in the Community, also from the Member States, and beyond the European Union. The entire international community has also expressed its solidarity with the Valencian Community and with the Spanish people and I can only thank them for that. Both the President of the European Commission, as well as the Presidents of the European Council and the European Parliament have conveyed to me their solidarity and their determination to use these mechanisms to support Spain.

I believe - we all have it in our minds - that in recent years our country, Spain, has proven to be an essential engine of wealth for the prosperity of the European Union. A reliable partner, generous in crisis management, such as the one caused by Covid or Putin's war in Ukraine. We helped our European brothers when they needed it and now they will help us.

I end, and I want to do so, dear compatriots, by telling you that the situation we are experiencing is tragic, it is dramatic. We are almost certainly talking about the most serious flood that our continent has seen so far this century. And I am aware that the response that is being given is not enough. I know it. I know that there are severe problems and shortcomings. That there are still collapsed services. Municipalities buried by mud. Desperate people looking for their relatives. People who cannot access their homes. Homes destroyed and buried by mud. I know that we have to improve and that we have to give everything. But I also know that we have to do it together, united.

It is not now a question of the General State Administration replacing the regional administration. No, now we have to support the regional administration, help it with resources and technical guidance. That is the quickest and most effective way to act at this very moment. That is the only thing that should concern us all now. There will be time to analyse negligence. To reflect on how to improve the distribution of responsibilities in the face of such extreme civil protection situations as the one we are experiencing. There will be time to talk about the importance of public services and their reinforcement in situations that we are experiencing as a consequence of the climate emergency and also the need to respect scientific advice and adapt to a reality that is that of climate change. There will be time to look back, to clarify responsibilities, to learn to be better in the face of these climatic effects that, unfortunately, will accompany us from now on. As there was after the Covid-19 pandemic.

But now we are in a different moment. Now we must put all our efforts into the colossal task that lies ahead. We must forget our differences, put ideologies, territorial sensitivities and discrepancies aside, and act as a single united country, in diversity and in the face of adversity. We have only one enemy to beat, which is the destruction caused by this catastrophe, and we must do it together, because the lives of many citizens are at stake, the dignity of the people who have died, the prestige of our country and the future of entire municipalities.

Spain always gives its best in times of crisis. We did it in the tragedy of the Biescas campsite, in the 11-M attacks and also in 2017 in Barcelona and Catalonia, in the covid 19 pandemic, in Filomena and also in the eruption of the volcano on the island of La Palma. Let's do it again. Let us add another chapter to the story of overcoming and resilience that is the story of our nation. And let us overcome this crisis together. I know we can. Thank you!

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