News
EarthBeat



Damaged cars are seen along a road on the outskirts of Valencia, Spain, Oct. 31, 2024, affected by torrential rains that caused flooding. Archbishop Enrique Benavent of Valencia expressed "grave concern" and said Mass for those affected after at least 95 people died, and many more went missing amid torrential rains that caused massive flooding. (OSV News/Eva Manez, Reuters)

by OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Valencia, Spain — November 1, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Pope Francis, the king of Spain, bishops and politicians decried the devastation and loss of life in southeast Spain amid horrendous floods that left thousands of people homeless and city streets unrecognizable.

In an Oct. 31 message posted on the Spanish bishops' conference's account on X, formerly Twitter, Francis expressed his "closeness with the people of Valencia." The pope said he is "close to them," and that "in this moment of catastrophe, I pray for them."

The archbishop of Valencia expressed "grave concern" and said Mass for those affected after at least 155 people died, and many more went missing amid torrential rains that caused massive flooding. Valencia, the worst-struck region, saw its heaviest rainfall in 28 years and observers are already calling it the flood of the century in Spain.

The flooding turned roads into rivers of floating cars and cut off highways and access points, with water reaching the first floor of buildings.

Archbishop Enrique Benavent said Oct. 30 he "hopes that the victims and missing persons will be found safe and sound as soon as possible," according to the Spanish Catholic news outlet Alfa y Omega.

The archbishop celebrated Mass for all those affected on the morning of Oct. 30 in a local basilica.

In a letter sent to Benavent and Msgr. Julián Ros, apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Albacete, west of Valencia, Spanish bishops shared "their pain at the difficult times that they are experiencing in their dioceses."

The horrendous flooding that left piles of cars stuck in between buildings in the historic narrow streets of Valencia and trapped dozens of residents was caused by storm Dana — described as an "unprecedented phenomenon" by Spain's defense minister, Margarita Robles.

To the bishops in the affected regions, Archbishop Luis Argüello of Valladolid, president of the Spanish bishops' conference, and Auxiliary Bishop Francisco César García Magán of Toledo, the conference's general secretary, sent their "sincere

condolences for the human losses, as well as our closeness and prayers for all those who are suffering material or physical damage caused by this type of catastrophic situation." They also asked that "our condolences and prayers" be extended to the affected families.

Advertisement

King Felipe VI spoke of his "devastation and concern" over the flash flooding.

Speaking of "enormous destruction" Oct. 30, he said accessing some areas was still difficult.

"Along with the Queen, we would like to convey our condolences to all the families affected who have lost loved ones and who in some cases still do not know what has happened to some of their relatives," he told Spanish media in a short news conference.

Since Oct. 28, authorities have responded to rescue calls in areas including Cuenca, Albacete and the Valencia region, where helicopters were dispatched to pull people from inundated homes and cars, according to The Washington Post.

Speaking the morning of Oct. 30, Valencia's regional president said it was still too early to provide a comprehensive death toll. "These are very difficult hours for relatives and for the disappeared," said Carlos Mazón. "We will confirm the number of victims over the coming hours but right now it's impossible to offer a precise figure. We're in shock," The Guardian reported.

"Yesterday was the worst day of my life," Mayor Ricardo Gabaldón of Utiel, a town in the Valencia region, told the national broadcaster RTVE. He said several people were still missing in his town. "We were trapped like rats. Cars and rubbish containers were flowing down the streets. The water was rising to 3 meters (nearly 10 feet)," he said.

Benavent wrote that the hope is that a catastrophic flood "will pass as soon as possible and that the residents of the most affected areas can return to normality."

He said that parishes of his archdiocese "will collaborate in everything necessary so that people can regain hope, from closeness and solidarity."

Celebrating morning Mass Oct. 30 in Valencia's Basilica of Our Lady of the Forsaken, he comforted "all those who are suffering."

"May they feel in us a friendly hand, a brotherly hand that knows how to sympathize and be attentive to their needs," the archbishop said. "To the people who are now homeless, who are suffering, we want to express the solidarity and closeness of the church and, to the extent of our possibilities, accompany them and attend to their needs."

Caritas Spain said Oct. 30 that it is coordinating with the Valencia City Council in order to support the people who have been housed in L'Alqueria del Basket and in the Petxina municipal complex, where they took shelter.

Caritas Valencia has also set up two accounts to collect financial donations to support the victims through the parish Caritas offices.

Spain declared three days of mourning after the flash floods devastated parts of the country.