News
EarthBeat



Kun Yeong-nam, 72, looks around her burned house, in which she lived in for 52 years, after a wildfire devastated the area in Uiseong, South Korea, March 27, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Kim Hong-Ji).

by OSV News

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ANDONG CITY, South Korea — April 1, 2025

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Pope Francis offered prayers and expressed deep concern over the deadly wildfires in South Korea, which have claimed at least 28 lives and caused widespread damage. The fire continues to spread uncontrollably across several regions.

A Catholic diocese in the country has also appealed for prayer and financial support for victims of the nation's deadliest wildfire to date.

The wildfire started on March 22 in Uiseong in the country's southeastern region. Despite frantic efforts from firefighters and security forces to douse the fire, it has spread to several counties.

On March 28, Francis said in a telegram, sent by Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin, that he "is deeply concerned by the threat to life and the damage caused by the widespread wildfires in various parts of Korea."

The pope said he is "entrusting the souls of the deceased to the loving mercy of Almighty God, he sends heartfelt condolences to those who mourn their loss" and "offers prayers for the injured and for the relief efforts of the firefighters and other emergency personnel."

The Diocese of Andong said the wildfire has engulfed and destroyed vast areas, making it difficult to estimate the damage accurately.

On March 24, the diocese issued a pastoral letter seeking prayer and financial support for the disaster victims.

"Many people, including parishioners in the Uiseong area of the diocese, are suffering from the forest fire damage," the letter said.

"Please pray for them so they do not lose hope," it added.

On March 25, the fire spread to the mountain behind Cheongsong Cathedral, forcing the parish priest, nuns and parishioners to evacuate.

There was no significant damage to the cathedral, but as the fire spread to the Cheongsong area, it is understood that many parishioners' houses were damaged.

In Andong city, the wildfire spread to the vicinity of Kyungpook National University, forcing students to evacuate for a time, and 50 out of 100 households in a nearby

village were completely burned down.

A wildfire broke out near Ugok Catholic shrine, raising concerns for a time, but no significant damage was done to the shrine.

As the flames of a raging wildfire swept towards the town of Samui-ri in South Korea's mountainous southeast, one village leader, identified by Reuters as Kwon, and his wife rushed home March 25 to try to help his extended family and neighbors get out of the burning area. They did not make it through the fire and their bodies were found close to their charred car.

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"The fire was so thick, he couldn't see his way. ... He is the head of the village, he felt he should come back," next-door neighbor of the village leader, 71-year-old Moon Han-sick, told Reuters.

On that same night, the fire spread to Bonghwa County, forcing Catholics in Murya-myeon to evacuate. It is feared the fire will continue to spread to the nearby Donghae area.

The Diocese of Andong reported that many houses of Catholics living in the Namseon and Imha areas of Andong Yongsan-dong Parish were completely burned down, and an entire village was destroyed.

Earlier on March 24, the fire destroyed pine trees and lawns around the cemetery of the Euisong Church in the Diocese of Andong.

Besides, two storage facilities and farm sheds operated by Euisong Parish Catholics were destroyed, along with various agricultural machinery and equipment stored there, causing huge losses. The estimated loss from the fire in the parish is about $36,506.

The Diocese of Andong said that it is forming an emergency response committee for forest fire damage centered on priests in accordance with the diocesan manual for disaster preparedness, sharing information, and seeking response measures.

The diocese also designated the 5th Sunday of Lent, April 6, for those affected by the wildfire.

Media reports citing government sources say the 2025 wildfires in South Korea are the deadliest on record. The blaze has burned down more than 35,000 hectares. At least 37,000 people have been displaced, and more than 300 structures, including temples, have been destroyed.

"We are nationally in a critical situation with numerous casualties because of the unprecedented rapid spread of forest fires," acting President Han Duck-soo told a government response meeting, The Associated Press reported March 27.