

# Rallies mark one month since Spain's catastrophic floods

AFP- Angry residents protested and lit candles in memory of victims on Friday as Spain marked one month since its worst floods in a generation killed 230 people.

Outrage swept the country after the October 29 catastrophe wrecked homes and businesses leaving thousands of cars piled up in muddy streets in the eastern Valencia region.

Telephone alerts reached some residents when water was already raging through towns, while several municipalities went for days without state help and relied on volunteers for food, water and cleaning equipment.

Church bells rang out at dusk in Paiporta, the epicentre of the disaster, at around the time the floods began. Several hundred locals, some wearing face masks, gathered near a ravine which was ravaged by the torrential rain.

They left a line of candles on both sides of the ravine in memory of 45 people who died in Paiporta in the floods.

"This tribute is for them, we put a candle for them so they are not forgotten," said Bea Garcia, a 43-year-old teacher.

"The people continue to feel alone, the anger remains and there is also fatigue and frustration. We are all exhausted." she told AFP.

At 8:11 pm (1911 GMT), the time when Valencia regional authorities issued an alert more than 12 hours after a warning by the national weather service several people played alarms on their mobile phones and chanted slogans calling for regional leader Carlos Mazon to resign or be jailed.

Similar rallies were held in towns and cities across Valencia, organised by trade unions, associations and local

organisations.

Another protest is expected in Spain's third city Valencia on Saturday. A first demonstration on November 9 drew 130,000 furious citizens demanding Mazon step down.

"We have to be extraordinarily understanding with the protests... there are still lots of people who have received nothing, so we cannot rest," Mazon told reporters on Friday, announcing the reopening of Valencia's metro on December 3.

Popular outrage boiled over in Paiporta on November 3 when residents hurled mud at King Felipe VI, Queen Letizia, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and Mazon.

Sanchez and Mazon were escorted away and their fleeting unity has since collapsed, with the left-wing central government and the conservative regional administration trading blame for the handling of the floods.

– 'Swimming in mud' –

Thousands of troops, police, firefighters and volunteers continue to clear debris, repair damage and extract mud from garages, basements and car parks in the traumatised Valencia region.

"We are literally swimming in mud. The children are still out of school, things are going very slowly in the village, and we can't find solutions," Sabrina Bermejo, a 41-year-old laboratory analyst, told AFP at the rally in Paiporta as she held a candle.

Spain's Economy Minister Carlos Cuerpo on Thursday reeled off a dizzying list of damaged property according to insurance data, including 69,000 homes, 125,000 vehicles and 12,500 businesses.

The government has scrambled to put together aid packages collectively worth 16.6 billion euros (\$17.5 billion) in

grants and loans to help stricken citizens.

But Amparo Peris expressed the despair of many in the flood epicentre who feel “abandoned” by politicians.

“We thank the volunteers, but we are very tired because this is not moving forward,” the 35-year-old domestic assistant told AFP in Catarroja, where garages are still caked with mud and two piles of rusting cars greet visitors to the hard-hit town.

“This is horrific... I feel powerless because they (the authorities) do nothing,” added Fina Solaz, 69, as she queued to collect essential goods.

AFP