

President of Canary Islands states that approximately 5000 people evacuated but further evacuations not envisaged as lava flows down to sea

Ángel Víctor Torres welcomed the fact that the volcano eruption on La Palma has not caused personal injuries and promised financial aid to remedy the material damage

He held a press conference with Spanish prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, and the president of the La Palma Cabildo, Mariano Zapata; all three emphasised the coordination between the different administrations, along with the preventive efforts undertaken and the information provided to the public

The president of the Canary Islands, Ángel Víctor Torres, said tonight that the volcano eruption in the Cumbre Vieja area of the La Palma town of El Paso has required around 5000 people to be evacuated, although further evacuations are not anticipated and the authorities will focus on compensating those who have suffered material damage: “Fortunately” no personal injuries have been recorded, he added.

Torres flew to La Palma this evening to take part in the meetings of the Scientific Committee and Steering Committee of the Volcano Risk Prevention Plan (PEVOLCA). Both meetings were held in the La Palma Cabildo and were attended also by Spain’s prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, who suspended his trip to New York where he was scheduled to take part in the UN General Assembly.

The Canarian president was accompanied by the region’s minister for public administration, justice and security, Julio Pérez, and welcomed the fact that the eruption had not caused personal injuries even though the material damage gives cause for concern. He stressed that every effort would be made to minimise the damage.

Torres thanked Pedro Sánchez for changing his schedule to fly urgently to La Palma. The regional president emphasised the work carried out by all the institutions to raise public awareness and keep them informed during the weeks leading up to the eruption of the volcano and during the course of today, Sunday. He welcomed the fact that the eruption occurred in a non-populated zone of the island. He explained that approximately 5000 people have been evacuated so far but further evacuations are not envisaged.



Echoing data from technical personnel, Torres said that an estimated 17-20 million cubic metres of lava had been generated by the eruption. He stressed that the island's airport "is open and safe".

Torres appeared at the press conference with Pedro Sánchez and the president of the La Palma Cabildo. Sánchez emphasised that the safety of the population was guaranteed and underlined both the cooperation between the three administrations and the work undertaken in anticipation of the eruption. He also referred to the support the State would offer to those affected by the eruption.

At its meeting tonight, the Steering Committee of the Volcano Risk Prevention Plan (PEVOLCA) stressed that this afternoon's eruption on La Palma did not cause personal injury thanks to the coordination efforts of the emergency teams which helped anticipate the response to the situation. Although the eruption occurred in a non-populated area, five thousand people were evacuated as a safety precaution. The lava has affected eight homes to date and attention now focuses on the advance of the lava flows down to the sea and any forest fires that may be triggered.

Members of the army's Emergencies Unit travelled to La Palma tonight, along with environment personnel sent by the island governments of Tenerife and Gran Canaria, firefighters from the Gran Canaria Emergencies Consortium and officers from the Canarian Police Force. They will join the teams already in place, which include firefighters from the Tenerife Fire Brigade and local personnel.

The Scientific Committee has recommended the establishment of a 2 km exclusion zone around the emission points to minimise the risk of impact by pyroclasts and exposure to gases. The public are urged to stay away from the lava flows due to the risk of exposure to gases, and to possible landslides and the high temperatures.

The experts reported that a typically Strombolian fissure eruption of basic magma commenced at 15:12. The information available points to the existence of two vents several hundred metres in length, aligned in a NS direction and approximately 200 metres apart, with various pyroclasts and lava emission points. The surface lava temperature can reach 1075°. The column of volcanic ash is estimated to reach 1500m in height, with gases reaching 3000m (according to the Toulouse VAAC).



The committee reported that the onset of the eruption coincided with a tremor recorded by all the seismic stations. A fall in seismic activity has been noted, although some low magnitude earthquakes continue. Earthquakes felt by the population are not ruled out. Meanwhile, the ground deformations continue, primarily in the area nearest the eruption, with the cumulative deformation now standing at 19cm.

Monitoring of the speed of advance and size of the flows will be conducted. Daily monitoring of sulphur dioxide (SO₂) given off by the foci of the eruption will be carried out using helicopter-mounted remote optical sensors.

Among measures adopted, the Canarian Dept of Education has closed all schools in El Paso, Los Llanos de Aridane and Tazacorte as a result of the eruption. The closure initially affects Monday 20 September but will be reviewed depending on the situation.

The island's network of hiking trails and paths has been closed, as have forest trails through Fuencaliente, El Paso, Los Llanos de Aridane and Villa de Mazo and several recreational areas.

Roads closed to traffic include the LP-212 to Tacande; LP-301, San Isidro-El Pilar road, from La Pavona to the junction with the LP-3, El Paso; LP-2014, Los Brecitos road, and LP-105, Los Tilos.

The committee reiterated the detailed advice to the public under the red alert level currently in force as a result of the eruption. The advice includes measures to be taken in the event of falling ash and a reminder to stay away from the eruption sites and lava flows.