

Chile wildfire under control: president

January 2 2012



An aerial view of a massive forest fire in the Torres del Paine National Park in southern Chile on December 30, 2011. Hundreds of firefighters in Chile have successfully brought under control a massive blaze that consumed 30,000 acres (12,500 hectares) of a national park in Patagonia, the government said.

Hundreds of firefighters in Chile have successfully brought under control a massive blaze that consumed 30,000 acres (12,500 hectares) of a national park in Patagonia, the government said.

"Thanks to the great work of our firemen, and better [weather conditions](#), the Torres del Paine fire is under control," President Sebastian Pinera said on his Twitter feed.

Vicente Nunez, Chile's top emergency official, said, "We were able to keep the fire from spreading."

Nunez said earlier Sunday that the five-day old inferno had failed to

spread over the past 10 hours -- a sign that about 550 firefighters' efforts to contain it were bearing fruit.

[Torres del Paine National Park](#) is a 2,400-square-kilometer (927-square-mile) paradise of granite-peaked mountains, natural Andean forests, Patagonian steppe and turquoise lakes deep in southern Chile.

Investigators arrested and later freed on bond an Israeli tourist they believe inadvertently set off the massive blaze on Tuesday by failing to properly extinguish a roll of toilet paper he had been burning.

The Israeli, 23-year-old Rotem Singer, denies starting the fire and his family accuses the Chilean authorities of making him a scapegoat for the disaster. Singer faces up to 60 days in jail and a fine if found guilty.

"It is very important to me to say that I was not the one who started this fire," Singer said on CNN Chile.

"They just dumped this on me. I did not think the trial was going to be handled the way it was. I never confessed," Singer stressed, insisting reports to that effect were due to "a translation error."

Singer's father Hezi earlier told Israeli military radio: "He could not have caused this disaster. He was a kilometer away from the [fire](#) when his friends woke him up."

Pinera has said the park, visited annually by 100,000 tourists, will remain shut throughout January.

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