

# Brazil waging 'war' on wildfires in crowded Sao Paulo state

August 26 2024, by Carlos FABAL with Louis GENOT in Rio de Janeiro

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With dense smoke drifting across a wide swath of Brazil, several flights have been canceled and travel on some roads has been halted.

Brazil was deploying military aircraft as part of a "war" against wildfires ravaging the southeastern state of Sao Paulo, with authorities warning on

Sunday that arsonists were setting blazes.

Following a crisis meeting of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's cabinet, Environment Minister Marina Silva announced a "war against the fire" and said [federal police](#) were investigating the "atypical situation" that has caused extensive damage.

"So far we have not detected any fire caused by lightning, which means there are people starting fires," Lula said in a video that he posted on X after meeting with Silva.

Tarcisio de Freitas, the governor of Sao Paulo, by far the country's most populous state with some 44 million residents, decreed a [state of emergency](#) in 45 municipalities and said two people suspected of starting fires had been arrested.

The president promised federal assistance to the states in fighting the blazes, saying there were already 3,000 firefighters working nationwide.

With dense smoke drifting across a wide swath of Brazil -- even reaching capital city Brasilia 720 kilometers (450 miles) to the north -- several flights have been canceled and travel on some roads has been halted.

"I stuck my nose out last night around 7:00 pm and I had a lot of trouble breathing," 66-year-old retiree Carlos Rodrigues told AFP. "I've lived here 32 years and I've never seen anything like it."



Videos posted on social media showed the city plunged into near-darkness by a dense layer of smoke.

Two factory workers died Friday in Urupes, in the northern part of the state, while fighting a fire, officials said.

The military aircraft being deployed include a KC-390 Embraer, a converted troop transport craft that can drop up to 12,000 liters (3,170 gallons) of water on [fire](#) zones.

The Embraer was sent to one of the communities most threatened, Ribeirao Preto, a city of 700,000 inhabitants about 300 kilometers from Sao Paulo.



But Silva said the plane "was unable to operate because of the amount of smoke," adding: "That gives you an idea of the problem."

Videos posted on social media showed the city plunged into near-darkness by a dense layer of smoke. Some residents have had to evacuate.

"It's apocalyptic," a person is heard saying in one video.

Authorities were hoping rains that fell Sunday would help alleviate the crisis.



The dense smoke drifted across Brazil, reaching as far as capital city Brasilia about 720 kilometers away.

Around the region, farm fields have burned and scores of cattle have died.

Governor de Freitas said 10 million reais (around \$1.8 million) were being allocated to help farmers who lose crops or livestock.

Amid prolonged drought, Sao Paulo state is experiencing its worst month for fires in decades, with 3,480 separate blazes identified, according to INPE, the National Institute for Space Research.

The government directly linked the situation to [climate change](#).

"Even the deniers can no longer deny the climate crisis," Lula said on X.

"We have to fight climate change with a lot of intelligence, and with financing from the richest countries that have already destroyed their forests."

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