

At least 70 dead, 47 missing as floods hit northern Turkey

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Officials announced that 70 people died in Turkey as of yesterday amid massive floods last Wednesday in Bartın, Kastamonu and Sinop in the western Black Sea region. The Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) said 47 people were missing.

The recent disaster in Turkey came as hundreds of millions of people are affected by floods, from the US to Germany and Belgium, Britain to China, North Korea and Japan. It raises the urgent necessity of a globally coordinated response, led by the working class, to climate change and the criminal policies of capitalist governments.

The flood disaster in the Black Sea region took place as forest fires in Turkey are still not completely contained. While the response of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government to the forest fires, especially in the Aegean and Mediterranean regions, has been inadequate, the emergence of the flood disaster led to even harsher social anger and criticism towards the government.

Citing data from the General Directorate of State Meteorology, Anadolu Agency reported that in some regions hit by the flood, precipitation was far higher than the annual average. This exposes the responsibility of the ruling class and its political representatives in several ways.

First of all, heavy rains and floods are the direct result of climate change produced by capitalism. The increase in sudden and heavy rains in recent years was not taken seriously by the government and local administrations. No measures were taken in settled areas through which streams pass through, and governments turned a deaf ear to scientific warnings.

Second, officials ignored the streams' flood boundaries and allowed high-density construction there. Retired paleoseismology specialist Dr. Ramazan

Demirtaş told the daily *Sözcü*, "The 400-meter width of the river bed has been reduced to 15-20 meters. Then these areas are zoned for construction. But also change the flow rate of the stream. A large mass of water then arrives. As this mass enters a narrow space, the water begins to rise. Then disasters like this happen. Stream beds should not be zoned for construction in any way."

Third, the impact of the opening of private-sector hydroelectric power plants (HPP) and mines, which intensified under Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, in the Black Sea region has been enormous. Despite protests by local residents, with the opening of the mining areas and the building of HPPs, forested areas were removed, stream beds changed, and, as a result, the natural structure of the region was deteriorated for the sake of the capitalist profit.

Finally, the fact that the General Directorate of State Meteorology warned the authorities three days in advance exposes the indifference and the responsibility of the government. On this, Dr. Demirtaş said, "Meteorology has done its part. But after this warning, something had to be done." He added, "We need to evacuate people three days before or take them to higher ground. And we could have prevented this loss of life. There should have been plans made before the disaster. But we make plans after a disaster happens."

While scientists try to raise these issues and call for measures on future floods, the Erdoğan government is seeking to shed its responsibility, hiding as usual behind religious fatalism. Attending the funeral of Fatih Keleş, who drowned amid the floods in the Bozkurt district of Kastamonu, Erdoğan hypocritically declared, "It is not clear where and how this [flood] would happen. Just like the situation of our brother Fatih."

The government fears that the disaster is intensifying

social anger in the working class. Faced with many protests in the region, Interior Minister Soylyu made the following statement in Bozkurt, seeking to divert opposition by appealing to nationalism: “This country, state and nation belongs to all of us. While we are trying to heal the wounds of people here, there are those who think ‘how can I harm?’ and ‘how should I make this a political material?’”

After the flood disaster, the government called for financial support to the public by launching an aid campaign, as during the coronavirus pandemic.

A report in the daily *Evrensel* reveals the crimes of the ruling elites, since this disaster was preventable. According to this article, a report was published by the Water Management Directorate of the Turkish Agriculture and Forestry Ministry in 2019 and flood warnings were issued. The maps prepared with reference to this report showed that in the event of a flood, all residential areas, including the Bozkurt Vocational School, Bozkurt Municipality and Bozkurt State Hospital, would be under water.

Construction Engineer Umut Deveci told *Evrensel*, “This disaster could have been avoided with much less damage if rehabilitation works had been carried out based on these maps.”

Moreover, geologist Professor Dr. Naci Görür explained the causes of the flood disaster and how to take precautions. “These are called flood plains. These are the most productive agricultural areas in the world. Flood waters calm down in these plains. If you disrupt this system, that is, if you build houses, HPPs, dams, roads, etc. in streams and valleys, if you turn flood plains into residential areas and reduce the natural drainage capacity, you will cause flooding and you will not be able to contain it.”

Görür continued as follows, “Floods and undrained atmospheric waters trigger landslides. Reducing vegetation increases both flooding and landslides. The drainage system in the Black Sea should be managed according to scientific principles and controlled by law. Just like earthquakes, you may not be able to prevent natural floods and landslides, but you can manage and take measures to minimize the damage.”

It remains unclear whether the flash flood occurred due to excessive precipitation or to the opening of the covers of the HPP located above the valley. The State Hydraulic Works (DS?) claimed that the HPPs played

no role, thus clearing the companies with them, by publishing a statement titled “The allegation that flooding caused by HPPs does not reflect the truth.”

The accounts of those who experienced the disaster in Bozkurt refute this statement, however. Local resident Kübra Çelik stated that one hour before the incident, HPP employees called the citizens and the police and warned them about the explosion.

Whether the immediate cause of the disaster is HPPs, environmental destruction or the increase in precipitation, the ruling class and its representatives opened the areas that should not be zoned for construction, narrowed the stream beds and ignored all scientific warnings. This shows that they are responsible for the resulting damages and loss of life.

After the disaster, Environment and Urbanization Minister Murat Kurum, who went to Bozkurt, Kastamonu with Interior Minister Süleyman Soylyu, looked at the people who suffered and are in mourning, and announced more future construction plans. He said, “There are collapsed buildings on the stream route. I express that we will heal the wounds of our citizens as soon as possible by constructing new buildings after the end of the search and rescue efforts.”

In short, Kurum was stating that they would continue the same construction errors and that they had no concrete policies to deal with future flood disasters.



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