



BPW Canarias
Asociación de Empresarias
y Profesionales

NOTA DE PRENSA



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The Association in the Canary Islands have come together to respond to the needs of the thousands of people and animals affected by the fire on the island of Tenerife.

BPW Spain launches #FrenaElEcocidio/#HaltEcocide campaign, given that 55% of fires in Spain are started intentionally.

- BPW members based in the Canary Islands have been directly affected by the fire in Tenerife. The Association is mobilising to meet the demands arising from the evacuation of thousands of people, and animals, on the island.
- The Guardia Civil has confirmed that the fire in Tenerife was arson, started deliberately, to date affecting over 14,000 hectares of land on the island, not to mention the countless habitats of species destroyed, and the evacuation of thousands of people.
- Following a proposal by BPW Canarias, the national Federation is urgently requesting that the Spanish government include 'crimes against nature' in the Penal Code so that there would be tougher penalties, and so that environmental crimes would be considered crimes against humanity and not go unpunished
- Full information on the initiative is available on the website www.bpwcanarias.org and signatures are being collected through the [Change.org](https://www.change.org) platform.
- So far in 2023, nearly 80,000 hectares have been burnt in Spain, many of them as a result of arson. The constant threat to the environment as a result of degradation that endangers ecosystems and human life must be a priority on the political agenda and must involve legislative changes.

Canarias 24/August/2023.- The Federation of Business and Professional Women of Spain (BPW Spain) has launched the campaign #FrenaElEcocidio or in English #HaltEcocide, urging the inclusion of ecocide in the Spanish Penal Code, in view of the fact that 55% of fires in Spain have been proven to be intentional. The introduction of ecocide into the Penal Code would mean tougher penalties, and would mean that environmental crimes would be considered crimes against humanity, and that they would not go unpunished. This initiative was proposed by BPW Canarias in response to the serious fire that has been raging on the island of Tenerife for the last week, the cause of which has been confirmed by the Guardia Civil as being intentional.

Many BPW members in the Canary Islands have been affected by the fire in Tenerife and the Association has mobilised to respond to the needs arising from the evacuation of thousands of people and animals. In coordination with local councils and voluntary organisations, BPW Canarias has been providing food, household goods, infrastructure and equipment at the shelters set up by the authorities.

The catastrophe in Tenerife has, so far, caused more than 15,000 hectares to burn inside a perimeter of 90 kilometres. It has affected seven protected areas and has meant the disappearance of a large part of the Corona Forestal, the threat to protected species, and the evacuation of thousands of people. BPW Spain through the Association in the Canary Islands has launched a website with all the relevant information www.bpwcanarias.org, and the collection of signatures is being carried out on the [Change.org](https://www.change.org) platform.

www.bpwcanarias.org

The president of BPW Spain, Silvia Vigatà González, said "this is not a one-off problem. Spain is the European country that has been most affected by forest fires in 2023, with nearly 80,000 hectares burnt this year, many of those fires as a result of arson. The constant threat to which the environment is being subjected as a result of the degradation that endangers ecosystems and human life must be a priority on the political agenda and must involve legislative changes".

The Federation's request will be presented to Town Councils, Island Cabildos and Corporations, Provincial Councils and Autonomous Regional Governments so that they can vote on and support the initiative in their plenary sessions, and so that the request can be passed onto Central Government.

The Federation of Business and Professional Women is asking that the Spanish Penal Code be reformed and that the crime of ecocide be introduced as "any unlawful or arbitrary act committed in the knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of causing serious, extensive or lasting damage to the environment".

The petition also calls for the introduction of this new offence to be accompanied by substantial penalties for crimes not only against the environment, but also against humanity as a whole, by compromising the future of generations to come. It should be borne in mind that at the moment setting fire to a forest area that leads to substantial and serious effects can lead to a prison sentence of between 3 and 6 years, with a fine to be paid over 18 to 24 months; if the fire has put human lives at risk, the penalties range from 10 to 20 years' imprisonment and a fine to be paid over 12 to 24 months. With the inclusion of ecocide in the Penal Code, these penalties would increase.

BPW Spain calls for the recognition of ecocide as an ecological crime and an international crime to serve as a deterrent to destructive practices that endanger human rights and the environment. Furthermore, it is asking for a proper investigation into why 93.3% of environmental crimes in Spain between 2015 and 2020 went unprosecuted.

To this end, from the Canary Islands, the president of the Association of Business and Professional Women, Antonia Varela Pérez, supports the creation of a Global Network of Women for the defence of Nature via the half a million women who make up the first global women's lobby BPW International (Business and Professional Women). This application will be presented to the United Nations.

Ecocide

Ecocide is understood as any illegal act or act resulting from a serious failure of foresight or precaution committed by states, public or private companies, or individuals and groups of individuals, in the knowledge that the act is highly likely to cause serious, widespread and lasting damage to the environment. A definition that is included in the wording proposed by the Group of Independent Experts for the Legal Definition of Ecocide in June 2021, is the one proposed by the 'Stop Ecocide' platform, which was submitted to the UN and as a reform of the Statute of Rome. Furthermore, ecocide involves much more than the destruction of nature, as it implies the destruction of habitats, species and ecosystems, so it is important that



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ecocide is placed on the same legal and ethical level as the worst crimes that can be committed.

Given this, it should be noted that Spain has 16 National Parks (4 of which are in the Canary Islands), 49 Biosphere Reserves (7 in the Canary Islands) and 195 Natural Parks (11 of them in the Canary Islands) which already have specific legal protection that must not be violated.

France is already considering it

As there is currently no international treaty recognising and prosecuting ecocide, some countries have already passed their own national laws. For example, in 2020, France passed a law making ecocide a crime punishable by up to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine of up to €4.5 million.

More prevention

Overall BPW is calling for tougher penalties, better management of our natural heritage, prevention policies, and greater environmental awareness. BPW wants intentional or grossly negligent behaviour, active or inactive, that causes such disasters such as the wildfires we have just seen, to be considered as ecocide, as it is an attack on the assets of humanity and future generations.

The protection of the environment and agricultural and livestock areas requires long-term commitment and is not simply limited to tougher penalties. Social consensus on environmental laws is essential and requires coordinated legal, institutional and educational strategies.

In order to strengthen legal environmental enforcements, institutions must be active in the work they are doing in this area, show that their strategies are actually working and are relevant to the environment and that what they have put in place actually serves as a deterrent strategy. It is necessary to publicise the seriousness of environmental offences of any kind, so that together we contribute to a comprehensive censure from society.

BPW Canarias believes that environmental education is crucial for long-term change in behaviour, as it fosters and encourages pro-environmental attitudes and raises awareness of the seriousness of anti-environmental actions, thus encouraging citizens to denounce these actions.

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