

You are in: World: **Africa**  
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Front Page  
 World



- Africa
- Americas
- Asia-Pacific
- Europe
- Middle East
- South Asia

From Our Own  
 Correspondent

Letter From

- America
- UK
- UK Politics
- Business
- Sci/Tech
- Health
- Education
- Sport
- Entertainment
- Talking Point
- In Depth
- AudioVideo

# Ethiopian fires 'out of control'



International help is urgently needed to tackle bush fires raging in southern Ethiopia for the past three weeks, say international experts.

German and South African fire fighting assessors, who have just returned from visiting the fires, say that Ethiopia cannot tackle them alone.

According to the authorities two separate fires in Bale and Borena zones, 300 km south of the capital, Addis Ababa, have reached "unbearable proportions" and are now "completely uncontrollable".

At a news conference in Addis Ababa, Johann Goldammer, who is heading the international fire emergency advisory group, said helicopters would be needed to water bomb the fires.

"The fire is burning in extremely inaccessible places and very steep terrain that cannot be reached by ground transport," he said

Approximately 70,000 ha of forest had been burnt to ash so far "and more will be destroyed unless urgent steps are taken to stop the conflagration", Dr Goldammer warned.

## National park at risk

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Two major blazes have been raging in the south for three weeks

The fire in the Bale region is now encroaching on the Bale Mountains National Park - which is home to several of the world's rarest species including the Simien Fox, Mountain Nyala and Menelik's Bushbuck.

Dr Goldammer said that more than 15,000 people from the area had been deployed so far to put out the fire and hundreds of students from Addis Ababa University had travelled to the region at the weekend to assist in attempts to control the blaze.

“  
**More will be destroyed unless urgent steps are taken**

”  
**Dr Johann Goldammer**

A BBC correspondent in Ethiopia says many people in the region are hoping that the rains, which were due last month, will come soon and help put out the fires.

She says the chances of that happening are slim, as the area has suffered from drought for the past two years.

Last week, Ethiopia announced the arrest of nearly 150 people on charges of causing the fires.

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[^^ Back to top](#)

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