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# Celebrating SA's firefighters

## TOTT REPORTER

SA's deployment of firefighters internationally last year, has yet again proven that our country's ability for fighting wildfires is being recognised.

"Our multiple deployments to Canada in 2023 is a vote of confidence in our wildfire firefighting capacity and abilities. We must be proud of our deployees who have been selected," Working on Fire managing director Trevor Abrahams said.

Working on Fire (WoF) had four deployments of firefighters and management to Canada since June 2023.

Abrahams who was the leader of the first group to head to Canada on June 3, said 2023 had been Canada's worst fire season in recorded history. The north American country has had more than 6,330 fires which have destroyed at least 17ha of forest.

WoF is an expanded public works programme aimed at providing work opportunities. It resides under and is funded by the department of forestry, fisheries & the environment

Abrahams said firefighters and management within WoF were given an opportunity to apply to be placed provided they possessed a valid passport, a valid yellow card and had a minimum of three-years' experience.

This year's deployment was the fifth collaboration between SA and Canada since 2015.

"Our firefighters were lauded for their energy, their strong work ethic and observance of safety measures on the fire line, as well as for the way they have accustomed themselves to the conditions in Canada, which were different from what they were used to in SA."

He added that the 2023 deployment was the largest ever with 30% being women.

The teams were hailed for their commitment and atmosphere they brought to the camps.

"Their infectious spirit, witnessed through viral videos on social media, ignited international curiosity about these dedicated South Africans who journeyed thousands of kilometres to confront Canada's wildfire challenge.

"This rich harmony of our firefighters who come from all over SA, with different languages and cultural practices, has also served as an inspiration for many Canadians."

The SA firefighters also learnt from their hosts.

Canada arms its firefighters with more advanced and detailed weather forecasts, and with information on moisture content in vegetation, to predict fire behaviour at any point in time. The incident commanders also use infrared scans to identify hot spots — technology not routinely used in SA.

Asked about how climate change was affecting the work of firefighters, Abrahams said the Canadian wildfires and the deadly and catastrophic wildfires seen in Maui (Hawaii), Algeria, and Europe and those seen in the North West and Free State provinces were "sounding alarm bells on the growing risks posed by global warming and climate change.

"With global warming propelling climate change, temperatures will rise over the next couple of decades which will lead to dryer conditions, and this will lead to more frequent fires fuelled by hotter conditions.

"It is our belief that these successful 2023 Canadian deployments will go a long way in ensuring that our firefighters and management are more capable and ready to respond to mega wildfire threats in SA," Abrahams said. — *SANews.gov.za*