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Canada praises SA firefighters for help fighting wildfires

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Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mélanie Joly, has expressed the country's gratitude to the team of South African firefighters from Working on Fire (WOF) who are helping combat wildfires across Canada.

The Expanded Public Works Programme, which began in 2015, has successfully seen 1 750 WOF management and firefighters assist Canada in its wildfire efforts. The team is currently in Canada.

In 2023, a historic deployment of 861 members from Working on Fire fought one of Canada's worst wildfires. In recognition of this extraordinary support, the government of Canada extended a note of thanks to the South African firefighting teams.

Reflecting on this, minister Joly



said that Canadians were under stress as they battled the blazes, which caused anxiety, especially for those displaced.

"The smoke and smell were affecting the entire territory of Canada, reaching as far as New York City in the United States of America. We needed help, and help came from people here in the south, who were

going through their own winter season," Joly said.

Trevor Abrahams, managing director of Working on Fire South Africa, said that the recognition award highlights the success of their six deployments to Canada during some of the country's most challenging wildfire seasons.

Abrahams added that seven

Working on Fire with Canadian Minister Mélanie Joly.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

firefighters who had been on previous deployments attended the event and had the opportunity to interact with Joly. He also stated that 216 members of Working on Fire are currently in Alberta and will return home on September 2.

"Our firefighters in Canada received high praise from the fire authorities at Alberta Wildfire as well as from the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC) for their fitness, discipline, work ethic, and enthusiasm they brought to the fire line."

"The deployment of WOF firefighters to Canada is part of the Canada-South Africa bilateral agreement which makes provision for support and co-operation on environmental matters, and the exchange and provision of firefighting personnel to assist each other during major wildfires."