

Chile's elite escaping by helicopter for Easter amid pandemic

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Santiago de Chile, April 10 (RHC)-- After reports emerged of wealthy residents in Chile's capital, Santiago, fleeing the city?????? by helicopter and private plane for Easter, amid the coronavirus crisis, Interior Minister Gonzalo Blumel went on state television to remind them they have a "moral duty" to remain at home.

"What is going to be tested this weekend is how responsible, how supportive, we are as Chileans," Blumel said, adding that "staying at home is not only an obligation, it is a moral and ethical duty."

Chilean health officials said earlier this week they planned to cordon off the city, setting up road checkpoints manned by police and military, to prevent city dwellers from fleeing to second residences in rural areas and coastal enclaves where they could spread the virus.

But Santiago Mayor Felipe Guevara told state television that the city had received complaints "that people are using their own or leased helicopter or aircraft to leave the metropolitan region for their second home."

The coronavirus pandemic in Santiago de Chile first appeared in high-end neighborhoods where residents, who regularly travel to Europe, are believed to have imported the virus. However, the poor who are unable to afford medical care and struggle with informal jobs are those who are currently paying the heaviest price for contracting the disease.

Chile has confirmed about 6,000 coronavirus cases, among the highest tallies in Latin America. For months, the South American nation has been gripped by protests against high living costs and extreme inequalities in a country where the richest have an income nearly 14 times greater than the poorest.

Chile is one of the most unequal of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. The income gap, which is about 65 percent higher than the OECD average, along with the slow

disappearance of the middle class are among the country's major challenges.

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