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Headline: 'French Spiderman' takes climate campaign to new heights

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HIGH-LEVEL ADVOCACY | Alain Robert, who has scaled more than 150 structures since 1975, climbs a building to raise awareness about drought and climate change, in Barcelona, Spain, on May 5, 2023. (REUTERS)

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BARCELONA — An urban stunt climber known as the “French Spiderman” for his daring ascents conquered another landmark by scaling a 166-meter (381-foot) Barcelona skyscraper on Friday in a bid to raise awareness about climate change and drought.

Sixty-year-old Alain Robert crawled up the exterior of the glass and steel-covered Melia Barcelona Sky Hotel, the Spanish city’s fourth-tallest building, with just a bag of powdered chalk and climbing shoes to aid his ascent.

“I would like to pass on a message on climate change and the problem of soil dehydration in Spain [for it] to be resolved quickly” by the government, he said after reaching the rooftop. The climb was not authorized and police detained him at the top.

Spain is facing a persistent drought and parts of southern Europe are in the grips of unseasonably warm temperatures that scientists say have been exacerbated by global warming.

Before the climb, Robert told Reuters the structure was “quite aggressive,” and half-joked that he would be feeling the effects of climate change and drought himself due to the heat.

He draped his fingers with climbing tape to prevent burns from the sizzling surface—heated by strong sunshine even though the maximum temperature in Barcelona on Friday was a relatively balmy 23 degrees Celsius (73.4 degrees Fahrenheit).

Dozens of onlookers gathered outside, craning their necks to catch a glimpse of Robert, sporting a bright-red suit and a cap, as he made his way upward in about half an hour.

Robert began climbing in 1975 on the cliffs near his hometown of Valence. Two years later, he took up the high-risk “free solo” feats, climbing alone and unaided by ropes or harnesses.

Since then, he has climbed more than 150 structures including the world’s tallest building, Dubai’s Burj Khalifa, Paris’ Eiffel Tower and San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge.

Police officers detain French “Spiderman” Alain Robert after he climbed a building to raise awareness about drought and climate change, in Barcelona, Spain, May 5, 2023. (Photo by ALBERT GEA / Reuters)

Meanwhile, also on Friday, the French government said it would ban the sale of above-ground swimming pools in a southern region because of persistent drought.

Ecological Transition Minister Christophe Bechu said the Pyrenees-Orientales could not afford to allow people to fill their pools while the region was suffering from a water shortage.

The rule is part of new crisis measures coming into force on May 10, he said.

Much of southern France is in the grip of a drought, more severe than any other since 1959, according to regional prefect Rodrigue Furcy.

If people were allowed to purchase pools "they may be tempted to fill them even when it's not allowed," Bechu told the RTL broadcaster.

"On the basis of what's happening with nature, and the situation that we're in, people are going to have to get used to the idea that global warming is happening right now," Bechu said.

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The measures to save water already in force include a ban on people watering their lawns and flowers or washing their cars.