

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

RECENT WEATHER PATTERNS

The Minister of Transport and Communication (Mr Mushimba)

Mr Speaker, I wish to express my sincere gratitude for the opportunity that has been accorded to me to give this ministerial statement on the weather patterns that have caused prolonged dry conditions and floods in some parts of the country. I felt duty bound to update the nation on the weather patterns for the 2017/18 Season and provide the current and future expected patterns since they affect the livelihoods of many of our people across the country.

Sir, you may recall that on 5th October, 2017, I officially issued the 2017/18 Rainfall Season Forecast. Generally, the forecast indicated that Zambia was going to experience normal to above normal rainfall. The advisory information issued with the seasonal forecast included the possible occurrence of flash floods and floods, infrastructure damage, occurrence of water borne and diarrhea diseases such as cholera as well as the occurrence of army worms.

Mr Speaker, whereas the rest of the country received rainfall on time in the early weeks of November, 2017, the 2017/2018 rainfall season commenced late over the Western, Southern and Lusaka Provinces, which only received rainfall in the first week of December, 2017. The beginning of December was characterised by good rainfall across the country until 24th December, 2017, when the southern half of the country started experiencing dry conditions.

Sir, the 2017/2018 season has seen poor rainfall distribution, particularly over the southern half of the country. The most affected provinces have been the Western, Southern, Lusaka and Central Provinces, including the southern districts of the Eastern Province. The weather patterns in these areas were characterised by dry spells and heat stress for the most part of January, 2018. This was followed by heavy rainfall and flash floods in February, 2018.

Mr Speaker, the dry spells were caused by the consecutive occurrence of tropical cyclones over the western Indian Ocean and atmospheric high pressure systems over Botswana and Zimbabwe. Although not a new occurrence in Zambia, the 2017/2018 dry spell lasted longer than usual, resulting in soil moisture stress over the southern half of Zambia.

Mr Speaker, the heavy rainfall was as a result of the clearing of the tropical cyclones and atmospheric high pressure system over Botswana and Zimbabwe. This allowed the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ), which is the main rain bearing system over Zambia, to establish over the southern borders of Zambia. In addition, a deep low pressure system developed over the eastern border of Angola associated with the ITCZ, which progressed south-eastwards into Zambia, resulting in the heavy downpour from 1st to 12 February, 2018.

Mr Speaker, a temporary reduction in rainfall was recorded from 13th to 15th February, 2018. For the rest of February, 2018, the whole country received normal to above normal rainfall. With these occurrences accumulated over the rainy season, the average rainfall recorded has gone back to normal, apart from areas around Katete, Petauke, Sinda and Chadiza, which are still experiencing some dry spells.

Mr Speaker, this situation has greatly improved the water table and soil moisture around the country, leading to an increase in water levels in our reservoirs and water bodies. This reduces the risk of low water for power generation and irrigation in the country.

Mr Speaker, I am encouraging members of the public to contact the Zambia Meteorological Department (ZMD) under my ministry for information on weather patterns by visiting the department's Facebook page, website and indeed submitting email addresses to the department so that they could be included in the daily distribution of the crop bulletin for updates on the weather and rainfall forecast in the country.

Mr Speaker, I thank you.