

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

MIGRATION OF HIPPOS IN NALOLO CONSTITUENCY

Mr Speaker, I rise to deliver a ministerial statement on the migration of hippos in Nalolo Constituency. This is in response to the urgent matter of public importance that was raised by the hon. Member of Parliament for Nalolo Parliamentary Constituency, who is in the House today.

Mr Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to clarify the issues raised and relieve the fears of the people of Nalolo Constituency. In order to address this matter more comprehensively, my statement will first address the cause of the hippo migration and, thereafter, highlight the steps that the Government has taken to address issues concerning human-wildlife conflict across the country, in collaboration with communities and our partners.

Mr Speaker, during the flood period on the Barotse Flood Plains, hippos along the Zambezi River migrate from the river to its tributaries where water levels are shallow and are good for pasture. You may wish to note that hippos do not swim, but they walk on the riverbed. These tributaries on the Zambezi River and also villages along the plains are a conducive environment for hippos during flood periods. When the floods subside, the hippos do not return to the Zambezi River immediately and this is the source of human-wildlife conflict.

Mr Speaker, human-wildlife conflict in these areas arises from fishing activities, as fishermen cast their nets near the hippos. It is a known fact that fish choose to reside around hippos because fish eat hippo dung. The hippos, in turn, hit the fishermen's canoes causing injury or death in some instances. Therefore, there is a need for people using or living along the water bodies to learn how to co-exist with the hippos by using fishing methods that will cause less conflict.

Mr Speaker, the other reason for human-wildlife conflict is poaching. Wounded hippos and those with calves are very aggressive and they become defensive to any passer-by, for an obvious reason. Every wounded animal will defend itself from attackers and also those with younger ones will defend to protect their young. Every week, each national park and wildlife officers in the Western Province receive not less than five human-wildlife conflict reports. Our priority has always been to attend to each report, especially those concerning injury,

death or crops being destroyed. You may further need to note that scaring away these animals by shooting in the air is not the best option as it ends up agitating them and they invariably become violent.

Mr Speaker, Nalolo is among the many constituencies in the Western Province affected by human-wildlife conflict. Other constituencies with similar problems include Mwandu, Sioma, Senanga Central, Kalabo, Liuwa and Mongu in the plains.

Mr Speaker, due to spillovers from human activities into wildlife habitats and wildlife movement into human settlements, we, as a ministry, reiterate that human-wildlife conflicts are inevitable. In line with our mandate to conserve and manage wildlife protected areas in a sustainable manner, the ministry has continued to recognise and address human-wildlife conflict as a perennial problem.

Mr Speaker, the solutions to reducing incidents of human-animal conflict lies in mitigating against the enabling factors at all levels. At a broader level and on a continuous basis, the Government is implementing four key interventions to address human-animal conflict. These include, but are not limited to:

- (a) this year, the Government plans to recruit wildlife police officers to enhance law enforcement, wildlife management and protection of human-wildlife conflict-prone areas;
- (b) developing and implementing general management plans;
- (c) increasing community involvement in wildlife; and
- (d) improving law enforcement and wildlife habitat protection through increased patrols.

Mr Speaker, further, the use of local radio stations to educate and sensitise communities living around human-animal habitats on the threats posed by animals and the times that they are likely to materialise and mechanisms for preventing harm to human life and property will continue to be employed.

Mr Speaker, in order for us to have an active early warning system, the Government has continued to conduct regular monitoring of animal population and movement coupled with early notification of communities and control to ensure animal density stays within recommended stocking rates. For effectiveness, the use of Global Positioning System (GPS) satellite collars and aerial surveillance for animal tracking will need to be scaled up, as in the case of Liuwa and Kafue national parks.

Mr Speaker, our aim, as a Government, is to reduce the scale and frequency and eventually eliminate occurrences to safeguard the lives of people and property from threat from wildlife. On their part, communities need to desist from encroaching on protected areas because experience has demonstrated that there are conflicts in land uses in these particular areas.

Mr Speaker, we are confident that the successful implementation of the integrated approaches to combat human-wildlife conflicts will go a long way in preserving life and safeguarding crops and domestic animals. These measures will result in a peaceful co-existence of humans and wildlife.

Mr Speaker, with those few remarks, I thank you.