

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

HUMAN-ANIMAL CONFLICTS

Madam Speaker, thank you very much for according me the opportunity to deliver a ministerial statement this afternoon.

Madam Speaker, I rise to deliver a ministerial statement on the recent human-animal conflict incidents that occurred in Chama North, Katombola and Mulobezi constituencies. This is in response to the urgent matters of public importance, raised by the hon. Members of Parliament of the respective parliamentary constituencies.

Madam Speaker, I am grateful to you for granting me this opportunity to highlight the various measures that the Government, through my ministry, is putting in place to address the issue of human-animal conflict and allay the fears of the people living in the affected areas.

Madam Speaker, in order to address the matter comprehensively, my statement will first address the human-animal conflict incident that took place in Chama North followed by Katombola and Mulobezi constituencies. Thereafter, I will outline the steps that the Government has taken to address the human-animal conflict situation across the country, in collaboration with communities and its partners.

Madam Speaker, Chama North Constituency is in Musalangu Game Management Area (GMA), located east of the North Luangwa National Park. As such, interactions between humans and wildlife are inevitable. It is against this background that various areas of the constituency, such as Kapalakonje, Kampuzunga, Mtanila, Mwiimba, Mantepa and Kaozi Zone, have experienced an increase in the incidents of human-animal conflict caused mainly by elephants, hippos, lions and crocodiles.

Madam Speaker, the increase in the frequency of human-animal conflict could be attributed to multiple factors, which are not limited to the following:

- (a) continued encroachment in animal habitats by communities for various reasons such as farming and settlements;
- (b) observable increase in wildlife numbers due to better policing;
- (c) sharing of water sources, especially of the Luangwa River, between humans and wildlife; and
- (d) search for forage by wildlife, which results into destruction of crop fields and food storage bins.

Madam Speaker, in an effort to mitigate the human-animal conflict, my ministry, through the Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW), has continued to deploy officers to respond to affected communities so as to safeguard human life, their crops and livestock.

Madam Speaker, with respect to the recent incident in Kaozi Zone D, where a pride of lions strayed into a known farm and began to hunt livestock, officers were immediately deployed to the area and in no time, the beasts were driven back into the wild and calm was restored among community members. Officers have remained alert on the ground and are available to respond to any other incident once reported.

Madam Speaker, my ministry, through the DNPW, has engaged various partners, who include the Community Markets for Conservation, popularly known as COMACO, which has a running project entitled “Consolidation of Livelihood Solutions for Wildlife Conservation”. This project is aimed at reducing human-animal conflict by creating a community land bridge and to equip communities with knowledge on how to interact with wildlife in a manner that minimises the likely occurrence of human-animal conflict. We hope that the project succeeds so that the lessons learnt can be rolled out to other affected areas across the country.

Madam Speaker, further, the DNPW and COMACO are working in collaboration with co-operatives, community forest management groups and community resources board (CRBs) to implement the following interventions to prevent measures aimed at reducing human-animal conflict in the area:

(a) *Training of Community Members as Blasters*

this is aimed at training communities in scaring of wildlife away from crop fields, granaries, and general human settlements using chili powder. Under this initiative, thirty-six community volunteers spread across the chiefdoms have been engaged to help in scaring away the animals. These are supported with the necessary gears and equipment to carry out field patrols around the farming blocks day and night;

(b) *Development of Participatory Village Land Use Plans (VLUPs)*

The VLUPs, as they are popularly called, are aimed at reducing unplanned settlements as this has been identified as one of the main contributing factors to human-animal conflict. In this regard, traditional leaders and community members have been engaged on developing community land use plans. These plans have locally developed by-laws, which outline the allowed and prohibited activities within chiefdoms and/or constituencies. Therefore, the VLUPs guide the communities on where they can settle, carryout their agricultural activities and many other social activities;

(c) *Paper Trail (Data Collection)*

in an event of an incident of a human-animal conflict, data is collected to help provide information that includes the type of wildlife involved, crop or livestock damaged, location of this incident and the names of the affected individuals, among others. This helps management to make decisions and to predict future occurrences; and

(d) *Other Mitigations*

the COMACO supports the communities with planting early maturing crop varieties and alternative livelihood activities such as gardening, poultry, goat rearing and bee-keeping. This is to mitigate human-animal conflict in the

constituencies and deter community members from engaging in poaching activities.

Madam Speaker, with respect to the incidents in Katombola and Mulobezi Parliamentary Constituencies, the DNPW received reports on 22nd May, 2022 with regards to human-animal conflict involving elephants. The reports were from Kazungula District in Chief Musokotwane's Chiefdom and communities surrounding the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park in Livingstone.

Madam Speaker, hon. Members of this august House may wish to note that elephants are migratory animals. During this season, it is normal for a high influx of elephants to arrive in the stated areas from the neighbouring countries of Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia. We call it the Kavango-Zambezi (KAZA) Region. As at 6th June, this year, 2022, more than 250 elephants were reported to have crossed into Zambia. This is an annual migration that happens as the elephants move in search of food and water. In this case, wildlife police officers were immediately deployed to the area to assess the threat and take appropriate action.

Madam Speaker, according to the report compiled by wildlife officers in the ministry, the crops destroyed in the areas are dry maize, fresh winter maize, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, cabbages, watermelons and groundnuts in Simonga, Maunga, Siyadavid, Mujala, Lushomo, Siya Soap and Kasiya villages. It was also reported that one goat and one sheep were trampled on by the elephants. The animals also caused damage to three water pumps. The communities living in these affected areas have been heavily affected by elephants destroying various crops and, at the moment, thirty farmers have had their crops and two domestic animals destroyed.

Madam Speaker, to control this situation, wildlife police officers were deployed on different occasions to attend to the reports. Assessments were conducted and action was taken by scaring away the elephants through blasting, which is gunfire, and fire crackers. This option failed and one elephant was controlled as the last resort to ensure that the rest of the herd was dispersed. The option of capture and translocation was not possible because the large number of elephants involved, which had crossed into Zambia from the KAZA partner countries, was too big.

Madam Speaker, elephants are by nature migratory, like I mentioned. In this regard, we are having a challenge of influx of elephants migrating from the neighbouring countries into Zambia. Some of these animals have been reported to have injuries, thereby making them more violent. The injuries have been occasioned by the community members who have attempted to kill the animals with assorted sharp objects in retaliation. I would like to take this opportunity to advise members of the public to avoid such practices as they agitate the animals and increase the risk of attack.

Madam Speaker, reports of two lions attacking livestock in the Mulobezi GMA were also received from 7th May to 10th June, 2022. The lions have, so far, killed thirteen herds of cattle, two pigs and three donkeys. A team of wildlife police officers and veterinary officers were dispatched to the area. All attempts to capture the two lions failed due to the tall grass that affected visibility for our officers. However, the situation seems to have been controlled.

Madam Speaker, this august House may wish to note that the Mulobezi GMA is a prime area rich in many wildlife species, including lions. Hence, members of the public rearing livestock in the area are encouraged to take appropriate measures to ensure safety of their livestock as it is not feasible to capture and relocate the lions to other protected areas.

Madam Speaker, the problem of human-animal conflict is not just in the mentioned constituencies. We have received other reports of human-animal conflict in various areas across the country such as Feira, Chiawa in Chirundu District, Chikankata, Luano, Mambwe and Siavonga and Livingstone constituencies.

To this effect, Madam Speaker, I can also be considered a complainant on behalf of the people of Livingstone that these animals are actually ravaging our fields. The animals mostly involved in the reported human-animal conflicts are elephants and lions. Unfortunately, in the last two weeks, we lost two human lives; a male aged twenty-nine years, in Chiawa and another male aged thirty-two years in Mambwe District. Both were killed by elephants.

Madam Speaker, while encroachments into wildlife areas and corridors could be a major cause of human-animal conflict, an expert opinion from the DNPW indicates that ecological and climate factors could be contributing to the high incidents of human-animal conflicts

across the country. For instance, the period from May to July is the breeding season for lions. This results into sub-adult males, and in a few circumstances, lionesses with young cubs being forcibly ejected out of the pride by the adult lions, thereby forcing such lions to wander far away from protected areas into community areas where they end up attacking livestock and, sometimes, humans. Equally, elephants are considered as wild raging animals whose feeding and migratory behaviour, if not recognised and taken into account in our town and land use planning, may continue to bring about conflict.

Madam Speaker, some practical measures being carried out on the ground to mitigate human-animal conflicts include a variety of methods such as chili blasting, use of watch towers, electric fences and safe grain stores. Further, the use of community radio stations to educate and sensitise communities living around animal habitats on the threats posed by animals, the times that they are likely to materialise and mechanisms for preventing harm to human life and property will continue to be employed.

Madam Speaker, in order for us to have an active early warning system, the Government has continued to conduct regular monitoring of animal populations and movements coupled with early notification of communities and control to ensure animal densities stay within the recommended stocking rates. For effectiveness, the use of the Global Positioning System (GPS) satellite collars and aerial surveillance for animal tracking will need to be scaled-up, save for a few communities in which we already have collared animals.

Madam Speaker, it is important to note that communities near wildlife protected areas will always face the risk of exposure to conflict with wildlife resources. Therefore, our aim, as the Government, is to reduce the scale and frequency of human-animal conflicts and, eventually, elimination of occurrences to safeguard the lives of people and property from the threat of wildlife. On their part, communities need to desist from encroaching on protected areas because experience has demonstrated that the increase in illegal settlements in protected areas result in conflict in land use in these areas. This is the central message we communicate to communities in our engagement.

Madam Speaker, other complementary measures that the Government has continued to implement is the delineating and demarcating of boundaries of national parks and GMAs. We are confident that the successful implementation of these integrated approaches to

combat human-animal conflict will go a long way in preserving life and safeguarding crops and domestic animals. It is our sincere hope that these measures will result in peaceful coexistence of humans and wildlife.

Madam Speaker, as I conclude, I would like to reiterate that in line with the mandate to conserve and manage wildlife protected areas in a sustainable manner, the ministry will continue to recognise and address human-animal conflict, as a perennial problem requiring sustainable solutions. At a higher level, the solutions to reducing the incidents of human-animal conflicts lie in mitigating the enabling factors at all levels. The ministry will continue working with co-operating partners to undertake sensitisation programmes in communities in and near GMAs and protected areas. Further, my ministry will prioritise implementing key initiatives and interventions aimed at addressing the problems of human-animal conflict.

With those few remarks, Madam Speaker, I thank you.