

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
ON THE
**RAINFALL PATTERN AND PROLONGED DRY SPELLS DURING THE 2023/2024
RAINY SEASON**
BY
THE MINISTER OF GREEN ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT (ENG. NZOVU), MP

Madam Speaker, I rise before this august House to provide an update on the performance of the 2023/2024 Rainfall Season and the long dry spells that our country is experiencing.

Madam Speaker, the House will remember that in October, 2023, I delivered a ministerial statement and rainfall forecast for the 2023/2024 Rainy Season on the Floor of this House. The forecast highlighted that the *El Niño* climate phenomenon, which warms the Pacific Ocean, would impact the rainfall pattern in the 2023/2024 season. This influence would lead to below-average rainfall, accompanied by short episodes of heavy rain and long dry spells. Additionally, the forecast indicated that the southern half of the country would witness the onset of the rainy season towards the end of December, 2023. Consequently, the nation would experience below-normal and drier-than-usual weather conditions, affecting various sectors of the economy and the environment.

Madam Speaker, as predicted by the by the Zambia Metrological Department the El nino climate phenomenon has indeed persisted, significantly influencing Zambia's rainfall pattern during the 2023-2024 season. As he anticipated, this condition has resulted in reduced rainfall across the country.

Madam Speaker, let me highlight the specific characteristics you are observing as the season unfolds:

- (a) Onset of rains, you will recall that in October the rains commenced over North Western Province as well as the Northern parts of Luapula and Western Provinces. By November, most parts of Zambia experienced the onset of rains, except in southern regions where it began towards the end of December. The late onset of

the rainy season of the southern half of the country delayed the planting of crops and affected their germination and establishment. On the rainfall amounts, Madam Speaker, overall the rainfall received so far during the 2023-2024 rainy season has been normal to below normal across most parts of the country as predicted. Moreover, excessive rainfall from late December 2023 to around 20th January 2024 caused flash floods, water logging and increased the risk of waterborne diseases such as cholera across the country.

- (b) Prolonged dry spells: Madam Speaker, have been observed since the 20th of June 2024 and expected to continue throughout February, especially over the southern half of the country. These dry spells coupled with high temperatures are depleting soil moisture and will fact agriculture activities and water availability.
- (c) Madam Speaker, what you observing now is consistent with the focus delivered earlier to this August House. These weather conditions pose several challenges to critical sectors within our economy. As we continue to monitor the weather patterns, it remains crucial to adapt our strategies for sustainable farming practices, water management and disaster preparedness. The collaboration between the Zambian Metrological Department and relevant stakeholders, in particular Disaster Mitigation Management Unit (DMMU) and the Ministry of Agriculture, will play a pivotal role in mitigating the of this climate phenomenon.
- (d) Madam Speaker, the following specific sectors have been affected;
 - (i) Agriculture: The reduced rainfall is likely to affect the growth and development of crops, leading to water stress, wilting and yield losses. Maize, soya beans and other staple crops are particularly vulnerable to the dry conditions as they require adequate moisture during the critical stages of growth.

- (ii) Water resources: The lower river flows and depleted soil moisture and groundwater levels are likely to reduce the availability of water for both domestic and irrigation purposes.
- (iii) Hydropower generation: The decreased water inflow to the hydropower reservoirs who affect the electricity production and supply. The low water levels in the major reservoirs at Kariba, Itezi-Tezi and Kafue Gorge both lower and upper may result in reduced power generation and increased load shedding, energy shortages and disruptions in the coming months, unless the situation improves
- (iv) Livestock: the patched pastures have affected the availability and quality of livestock feed, which may in turn affect the health and productivity of animals.
- (v) Ecosystems: The natural habitats, wetlands and biodiversity may be stressed due to the reduced water availability and increased human pressure. Some ecosystems may experience degradation, loss of habitat, and loss of species. This may have implications for the provision of ecosystem services and the conservation of natural resources.

Madam Speaker, considering the current weather situation and the forecasted continued drier conditions throughout February, we edge stakeholders to take the following actions;

- (a) Farmers need to monitor weather updates regularly and adjust farming activities accordingly, they also need to implement water conservation measures such as mulching and proper soil management practices to optimize water usage, especially in areas experiencing rainfall deficits and low soil moisture levels, they also need to seek alternative sources of income and livelihood, such as off-farm activities, to cope with reduced crop production and income, and they

should equally report any crop damage or livestock disease to the nearest agricultural extension officers or veterinary officers for assistance.

- (b) Water users are edged to use water sparingly and efficiently for domestic and irrigation purposes. We need to avoid wastage and leakage of water. We also need to have harvest and store rainwater wherever possible. We also need to treat and purify water before consumption or use. We should report any water shortages or conflicts to the relevant authorities for reservation.

- (c) Energy customers are encouraged by my ministry to make use of the energy-efficient practices, as emphasized during COP 28 as follows:
 - (i) Conserve and ration electricity usage by being mindful of our consumption, turning off lights, fans and other electrical devices when not needed. We also need to consider using energy-efficient appliances and LED bulbs.

 - (ii) Use alternative renewable energy sources such as; solar, if possible install solar panels for electricity generation, wind can be harnessed to generate wind energy through small wind turbines, and biomass were we can utilize organic waste for energy production.

 - (iii) Reporting power issues promptly of any power outages or faults to the power utility company, ZESCO, under the Ministry of Energy, should be done timely for repairs and maintenance.

Madam Speaker, by adopting these practices, we can collectively contribute to energy efficiency and reduce the strain on our power grids. Indeed, citizens are therefore edged to work together to ensure a sustainable future.

- (d) General public to be made aware of the potential health and safety risks associated with dry conditions, such as dehydration, heatstroke, fire hazards and waterborne diseases. We need to drink plenty of water and stay hydrated. We need to avoid exposure to direct sunlight and high temperatures. We also need to follow hygiene and sanitation guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health to prevent the spread of disease, such as cholera. We need to report any signs or symptoms or illnesses to the nearest health facility.

Madam Speaker, given these conditions, a rapid assessment of these impacts has been initiated. The Government has constituted a joint team of experts led by the Vice President office through the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit (DMMU), Ministries of Defense, Agriculture, Green Economy and Environment, and Information and Media to conduct a rapid assessment of the crop damage and food security situation caused by the dry conditions. The teams are already collecting data on crop conditions, production estimates, and food security indicators from selected districts across the country. The teams are also identifying the most affected areas and vulnerable groups, and the mitigation measures needed to support them.

Madam Speaker, once the rapid assessment is complete; the Government will issue a comprehensive report that will provide a detailed analysis of the impact of the dry conditions on the agricultural sector and the food situation, as well as on water and energy security. The report will also provide recommendations for targeted interventions that will aim to support the affected communities and mitigate adverse effects of the dry conditions.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, the 2023-2024 rainfall season has presented in significant challenges that require urgent and coordinated action from all stakeholders. We remain as Government, committed to addressing these challenges promptly and effectively, and we appreciate the collaboration and support among Government departments and agencies in this endeavor.

Madam Speaker, I call upon the hon. Members of Parliament to unite and face these challenges head on. The public, Madam Speaker, must be assured that this Government would do everything possible in its power to ensure that the nexus of food, energy and water security amidst the changed climate conditions is addressed.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.
