

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS
ON THE
HUNGER SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY
BY
THE VICE-PRESIDENT (MRS NALUMANGO)

Madam Speaker, I thank you for according me the opportunity to speak in the House, in response to a matter of urgent public importance, raised by the hon. Member of Parliament for Kasenengwa Constituency, Mr Philemon Twasa, in which the hon. Member of Parliament has asked for a position on what measures the Government is taking to alleviate the hunger situation across the country.

Madam Speaker, the Government has been observing the weather patterns, maize production and overall food security situation, especially of the most vulnerable communities. Against the backdrop of the 2023 vulnerability and needs assessment, as well as emerging dynamics in the food production sphere, the food security threat faced by the country was evident. Hence the Republican President, on 29th February, 2024, declared the prolonged dry spell which is now a full-blown drought, a national disaster and emergency. The drought has so far affected eighty-four districts in the southern half of the country. I must say this was done over ten days ago. So, for now, because the drought continues in the western part, the number of districts may have increased, impacting about 1 million ha of planted maize out of over 2.2 million ha planted, which represents 43.2 per cent of the entire planted hectareage.

Thus, at least 6 million people are estimate to have been affected by the drought as at 15th February, 2024, because these are agricultural households, we expect that they are food insecure and in indeed of relief food for the remainder of the year.

Madam Speaker, in terms of measures being taken to alleviate hunger, the House may wish to know that the Government through the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit (DMMU) is already providing relief support to an estimated 2.04 million people who were identify in depth vulnerability and needs assessment to be food insecure for the period October 2023 to March

2024. In this vain, so far over 13,000 metric of relief white maize has been released to sixty-seven food insecure districts.

In addition, the Government through the Minister of Community Development and Social Services implementing social protection interventions including the shock responsive social cash transfer to attend to the vulnerable households in terms of coverage at individual level. The intervention is reaching over 2.7 million people in the thirty nine districts across the ten provinces. The ministry will further increase the coverage and enhance the social cash transfer through horizontal expansion of the social cash transfer programme by extending cash transfers to new households currently not benefiting from the social cash transfer programme.

Madam Speaker, further, the DMMU, in my office will continue to provide relief food for the 2.04 million people identified to be food insecure in the 2023. Along with the additional households that are being identified to in need of relief food following the drought condition we are currently experiencing. Similarly, social protection measures under the Ministry Of Community Development and Social Services will be sustained to benefit the vulnerable population.

Madam Speaker, to provide more detail and elucidation, the House may wish to know that humanitarian response clusters have been activated since the declaration and have since been meeting to identify and evaluate the short and medium term interventions required to address the hunger situation based on the existing contingency plan for 2023. As well as new emerging data from ongoing rapid needs assessment, the result in drought response and recovery plan will be the basis for further resources mobilisation and a more robust and guided comprehensive drought response and recovery interventions throughout the country.

Madam Speaker, some of the additional interventions targeted at addressing food insecurity in the country as outlined by His Excellency President, Mr. Hakainde Hichilema, include the following:

Budget Re-Alignment

Re-aligning the budget and channelling more resources towards humanitarian relief interventions has to be done and the hon. Members must be ready to relook at the budget as will be proposed by the hon. Minister of Finance and National Planning because we are all affected.

Food

There will be sourcing of additional maize and other food to mitigate the deficit. This will be done for example, by engagement of commercial farmers to grow early maize variety from which is expected that over and in fact I must say that this has already been done.

Madam Speaker, I did mention in this House that commercial farmers had cultivated maize under early maize that was meant for export market. I think through me and the Ministry of Agriculture we have said that because of the drought, this maize will be purchased by the Government so that the people of Zambia do not go hungry. So, this is one way that we are going to increase food in the country. So, the Government will buy from the commercial farmers the maize which was meant for export.

There will be enhancement of community sales to the vulnerable by the food reserve agency, while working hand in hand with the DMMU on the provision of purchasable maize in the communities. This is done normally but under this, it will be enhanced.

Madam Speaker, increasing soft agricultural loans to our citizens for mechanisation and increased productivity, this will be done in the immediate and short term, this will be done but it will continue in the long term.

Madam Speaker, reducing incidents of smuggling, and in this regard, Government has deployed the security and defence personnel to man all known smuggling routes. This is an appeal to all of us, particularly for us who come from border areas to continue to sensitise our people that the little money that they get from smuggling can bring calamity to our people. Let us keep all our food in our country.

Madam Speaker, supporting additional beneficiary households under the wetland cropping component to enable them grow a quarter hectare of maize during the dry season. I think last week, I even called upon the hon. Members that we can also go and grow even under irrigation one hectare or half that will not be just for your household but will go a long way. You better grow, if you have never grown. That is something that we need to do.

Madam Speaker, further, leveraging Zambia's Defence Forces to expand irrigation schemes as a way to increase food production, for example the one saying question, if it the hon. Member of Parliament for Lunte—

We intend to have an irrigation scheme there to produce more maize because there is a lot of water in Lunte, Mporokoso. So, this will be done. It is one of the measures that will be done in order to mitigate the shortage of food that we may experience because of the drought.

Madam Speaker, in the field of energy, I thought I could speak about other things, the hon. Minister will come and give comprehensive statements on the issue. However, I thought I could mention energy because it is very important. Energy is important for us to talk about during this terrible drought that we are experiencing.

Madam Speaker, the President did mention and it is the intentions of the Government accelerate the development of alternative energy sources such as solar, wind and others. This calls for us, when we talk of this development of alternative energy, we can be the starting point from this House. This is because I think hon. Members of this House have the capacity of putting up as an example solar systems in their own homes and farmers, so that we can release a bit of power that would go to other works including the industry.

However, what is so important in this matter is that there will be importation of power, including rationing of electricity. I think we have already heard ZESCO announcing that we will start load shedding to sustain irrigated agricultural production and for industries.

Madam Speaker, livestock is also affected by the drought—and it speaks to a hunger situation. For that reason, there will be promoting of good management of pasture and rangeland and ensuring that citizens do not engage in bush burning because we need every bit of grass.

We shall also undertake sensitisation on the harnessing of stover, grass or stalks of maize or any other crop, which grew. We do not have to blow away the maize stalks from the crops that we could have lost. It is important to harness stalks from both the affected fields as well as from thriving fields. Even if our fields did well, immediately after harvest, harness the stalks for livestock feed. This is crucial for livestock production and productivity. Nothing should be thrown away and nothing should be burnt this year.

Madam Speaker, the Government is going intensify cattle vaccinations to prevent disease outbreaks that may occur due to increased livestock movements as they cover long distances in search of water and pasture.

Madam Speaker, hon. Members will remember that last year, in our last Sitting, there was an outbreak of anthrax. It occurred because of a lack of water. As animals dig down to try to get water, they end up being infected with anthrax. We also saw the movement of animals. Therefore, the Government is saying, we have to intensify vaccinations against diseases such as anthrax.

Madam Speaker, on water, for the medium to long-term period, the Government will mitigate water stress in some parts of the country by constructing and rehabilitating small dams to sustain the lives and livelihoods of local communities through multiple uses by securing access to water for domestic use, crop production, fish farming; livestock; and various water-dependent activities.

However, what is important about water is that the Government will encourage drilling and maintenance of boreholes to provide drinking water for humans and watering points for livestock in drought-stricken areas.

Madam Speaker, the declaration by the President is a call to all our partners, both local and international, to avail food and other support that they may have, in order to provide the required relief. Given that this is a national disaster and emergency, the life- saving interventions such as the provision of relief food and cash transfers are already under implementation. Other interventions highlighted earlier which focus on food production will continue to be implemented throughout the year and some will remain as permanent as permanent measures, particularly given their developmental nature.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.
