

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
ON
SENSELI MINE DISASTER IN CHINGOLA
STATEMENT BY THE VICE-PRESIDENT

Madam Speaker, I rise to render a statement and update the nation on the open pit mine accident. This follows a matter of urgent public importance raised by the hon. Member of Parliament for Roan, Mr. J. Chibuye, on Tuesday, 5th December, 2023.

In his matter of urgent public importance, Mr J. Chibuye requested the Acting Leader of Government Business in the House to update the nation on the miners trapped in an open pit mine in Chingola, Copperbelt Province.

Facts About the Accident

Madam Speaker, in brief, the facts are that during the early hours of Friday, 1st December, 2023, an estimated thirty-six miners were trapped following a blockage of the mining tunnels at three mining sites due to a mud-slide that occurred subsequent to heavy rains experienced in the district. The Government conducted interviews with some miners who survived the accident to estimate the number of victims trapped underground, and the estimates are as follows:

- (a) Site one with six entry points or tunnels has twenty-one people suspected to be trapped. Of these, three have been retrieved.
- (b) Site two has one entry point, and is reported to have ten people trapped; and
- (c) Site three has one entry point, and is reported to have five people trapped.

Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the nation that following the incident on Friday, 1st December, 2023, a search and rescue team was immediately constituted to undertake emergency search and rescue operations to help the trapped miners at the three mining sites. I wish to reiterate that the Government is committed to ensuring that all the trapped miners are rescued.

Madam Speaker, the House may wish to note that the Government has established a command centre comprising the Ministry of Mines and Minerals Development, the Ministry of Defence, Konkola Copper Mine Plc (KCM), and the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit (DMMU). The Command Centre is overseeing the Rescue Team, which comprises mine search and rescue teams for all mines in Chingola.

The DMMU in my office is facilitating resource mobilisation and disaster response co-ordination in a multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder emergency response to ensure that the search and rescue operation is concluded within the shortest possible time.

Madam Speaker, State actors participating in this operation include the DMMU, the Zambia Army Special Forces Unit, the Zambia National Service (ZNS), the Zambia Police Service, various Government ministries, the Provincial Joint Operations Command, the District Joint Operations Command, and the Provincial and District Disaster Management Committees.

Madam Speaker, the search and rescue team also consist of the following actors drawn from the private sector and the community:

- (a) local community members who are providing search and rescue services;
- (b) mines which are providing emergency rescue services, logistical support and technical advice include; Konkola Copper Mine and Mopani Copper Mine; and
- (c) the private sector which is providing material and technical support.

Madam Speaker, so far, large quantities of water have been pumped out of site 'a' which had a large volume of water and mud that blocked access to six tunnels. The team has also excavated all sites to remove mud in order to restore access to the tunnels.

Madam Speaker, one person was rescued from site 'a', a 49 year old male hailing from Chingola District on Tuesday, 5th December, 2023, and is currently undergoing treatment at Nchanga South Mine Hospital in Chingola District. The condition of the survivor is stable and his condition has greatly improved since. We thank God for that life.

Sadly, Madam Speaker, two bodies were retrieved from site 'a'. One body was in a very bad state and was buried on the 7th December, 2023, following the identification of the body by family members in Chingola District while another body was recovered in good condition and was believed to have died a few hours before being retrieved. These are some of the things that grieve us because of the condition of the body then, it was deduced that this person had not died for a long time. May their souls rest in eternal peace.

Madam Speaker, the search, rescue and recovery operation appears indefinite despite the great progress made uncovering the tunnels at all three sites. The strategy has involved making use of the local miners and mine rescue team and to use all the resources available until people are either rescued or indeed, bodies recovered. Further, the registration of people with missing family members believed to be in the pit is being done. These are from various districts including; Chingola, Luanshya, Kitwe, Mufulira and Chililabombwe.

Madam Speaker, the Government will continue to among others putting in place a rigorous screening process for those claiming have lost their loved ones in the accident and this will remain in place until the rescue mission or indeed, recovery mission is completed. Secondly, the Government will ensure that two members from each family affected are on site for easy of identification as bodies continue to be retrieved. Two members from each family will be looked after in Chingola until this mission is done.

Mr Speaker, I urge the nation therefore, and the affected families to remain hopeful and prayerful as the Government is doing everything possible to rescue the trapped miners and retrieve the bodies. Your Government will not relent until this mission is completed as judiciously as possible.

I thank you, Madam.
