

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
ON THE HUNGER SITUATION AND DRY SPELLS IN THE COUNTRY

Minister in the Office of the Vice-President (Ms Chalikosa): Mr Speaker, the dry spells that Zambia is experiencing is a regional problem that started during the mid of January, 2019. The other countries that have suffered from the dry spells are Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The House may wish to note that that Southern African Development Community (SADC) is concerned with the prevailing dry spell, in view of this. A number of meetings have been lined up with latest being one which was held in Namibia and another, ongoing in Ethiopia.

Mr Speaker, in our country these dry spells have mainly affected the Southern half with parts of Central, Eastern, Lusaka, Southern and Western Provinces being severely hit. These dry conditions have been influenced by the weak state of the El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) which has resulted in below average rainfall in Southern Zambia.

Mr Speaker, the contingency plan for 208/2019 which the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unity (DMMU) prepared was based on the downscaled region forecast by the Metrological Department from the early warning information received from the Climate Services Center of SADC. It indentified dry spells and localized floods as the major hazard that would characterize the current season. According to the forecast, the 2018/2019 rainfall season would be largely influenced by weak state of the El Nino Southern oscillation which for Zambia implied normal to below normal rainfall conditions over most parts of the country.

Mr Speaker, the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit (DMMU) conducted the 2018 In-depth Vulnerability and Needs Assessment with the purpose of understanding the impact that prolonged dry spell and floods had on selected sectors of the economy. A total of 954,119 people (159,020 households) from thirty-five districts needed relief food for a period of eight months beginning August, 2018 to March, 2019. A total of 5,670 metric tonnes of relief maize has so far been distributed in thirty-five districts, which were assessed by the Zambia Vulnerability

Assessment Committee (ZVAC) and additional thirty-four districts which were not captured in the assessment.

Sir, the districts which were not in the assessment include among others, Mpika, Mongu, Itezhi-tezhi, Zambezi and Lumezi. The distribution is still on-going in most districts across the country. The House may wish to note that the office has received complaints that quantities allocated are low in places such as Mitwi in Kalabo and Monze. We have taken note of this concern and reviewed the quantities allocated to the districts. Our response in terms of increasing the quantities is case by case.

Mr Speaker, the House may wish to note that the current relief distribution will end in March, 2019 because the lean period for food insecure households would have significantly reduced. Most households as a coping mechanism by this time would have started subsisting on green crops and vegetables from the fields. Their situation however, this year is different for provinces such as Southern, Western, Lusaka, Central and part of Eastern Provinces due to prolonged dry spells being experienced in these areas.

Mr Speaker, the National Coordinator, the DMMU and I have been on the ground in Western and Southern Provinces to have an on-spot-check on the impact of the dry spells. According to our observation, the maize is indeed wilting.

Mr Speaker, the metrological department rainfall anomaly forecast shows that most parts of the Southern half of the country will likely continue having rainfall deficit. This may lead to poor soil moisture conditions to support crop growth and water supply for livestock. The forecast for the next ten days still does not raise any hope as the dry conditions are expected to continue in Southern, Western, Lusaka, Central and part of Eastern Provinces. The situation therefore, may worsen the already compromised food security and nutrition situation for most of the agrarian households in the aforementioned provinces. Going forward, the House may wish to note that the current relief distribution will continue but in an expanded form to bring on board districts that have been affected this current season.

Mr Speaker, as already indicated, we are closely monitoring the food security situation. The Ministry of Agriculture will soon be in the field to do the crop forecast for 2018/2019 Production Season. The DMMU and other stakeholders use this information from the Zambia Meteorological Department (ZMD) to establish the number of districts that are likely to be food insecure. The DMMU has already started doing a desktop analysis of the situation and will move in the field earlier than the conventional period which is usually April or May of each year, when we conduct an in-depth vulnerability and needs assessment. We are also developing concept notes to include co-operating partners since the caseload of food insecure households will significantly increase.

Mr Speaker, allow me to also inform the House that the Northern part of the country which is Agro-Ecological Zone 3 has on the contrary received above normal rainfall. A number of critical infrastructure such as crossing points have been damaged and some completely washed away. The DMMU, in collaboration with stakeholders have responded to these calamities and some have been completed and work on a number of them is still underway.

Mr Speaker, may I assure the House that we enough early warning information on the prevailing situation for us to take early action. We will inform the nation the exact areas including the estimates of the population at risk of food insecurity once an in-depth assessment is conducted. We will ensure as before that no one dies of hunger. The office is open to collaborate with hon. Members of Parliament since they are key stakeholders in resolving issues such as food insecurity that affect people on the ground. I would therefore, encourage them to visit the Office of the District Commissioners who in turn, will ensure that the information reported reaches the office of the National Coordinator.

Mr Speaker, I thank you.