

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
ON TROPICAL CYCLONE IDAI

The Minister of Transport and Communication (Dr Mushimba): Mr Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity you have granted me to give the ministerial statement on the Tropical Cyclone Idai. The cyclone has ravaged parts of Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe and gave enhanced rainfall over Luapula, Northern, Muchinga and parts of Eastern, Copperbelt and North Eastern provinces of Zambia while drying most areas over the Southern half of the country.

Sir, I felt it prudent to update the nation through this august House on some of the impacts Zambia has experienced due to this extreme weather event; Tropical Cyclone Idai as well update the House on the general performance of the 2018/19 Rain Season.

Mr Speaker, allow me to mention that in general a cyclone or tropical storm positioned the way Cyclone Idai was positioned over the Indian Ocean and long the Mozambique Channel generally would give rise to enhance rainfall from the North East due to a ratio of moisture as the low pressure cyclone moves along its path. We have seen the enhanced rainfall activities in the Northern half of the country. It also has a tendency to dry opposite regions and we have seen this dryness in the Southern half of the country.

Sir, at this juncture, I would also want to acknowledge the devastation that this cyclone has had on Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe where many deaths have been recorded. For instance, a three-day national mourning has been declared in Mozambique and we will them in our prayers as they recover from this extreme weather event.

Mr Speaker, the Tropical Cyclone Idai developed over the central coast of Mozambique as a tropical storm in late February, 2019 and later, developed into a full Tropical Cyclone in early March, 2019. It was projected to move west ward towards Zimbabwe while reducing its intensity and strength from the 14th to the 18th March, 2019.

The Ministry of Transport and Communication has been monitoring and issuing updates through the Meteorological Department. This information has been shared with all sectors and

institutions such as the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit (DMMU), the Water Resources Management Authority (*WARMA*) and the Ministry of Agriculture. We have also shared with the provinces through our provincial meteorological offices including the general public through our daily weather forecasts, the seven-day weather forecasts and the ten-day crop weather bulletins. A special issue of the seven-day weather forecast was given on the 13th March, 2019 and indicated the areas that were going to receive more rainfall and the areas that were going to record extra dry conditions during the passage of the Tropical Cyclone Idai from the 14th to 18th March, 2019.

Sir, allow me to report back to this august House that the seven-day weather forecast that the ministry issued on the 13th March, 2019, was very accurate and that the country has recorded above average rainfall in areas which were cited were going to be impacted by the Tropical Cyclone Idai. The ministry has also recorded below average to no rainfall at all over the Southern half of the country during the same period.

Mr Speaker, let me now recap the 2018/19 Rainfall Season Forecast that I shared with this august House in October, 2018, where we indicated that the Southern half of the country was going to receive below average rainfall while the Northern half was likely to receive surplus rainfall. In the same weather forecast, we also indicated that the rain season was going to start late in November, 2018 over most parts of the country. Further, we indicated that the Southern half was going to be characterised by dry spells and an early end to the rain season.

Sir, what was outlined in the 2018/19 Rain Season Forecast is what we are observing in areas over the Northern half of the country where heavier than normal rainfall has been recorded in some places exceeding 50 per cent of what they normally receive in the season.

In contrast, areas over the Southern and Western Provinces including area on the Copperbelt such as Mpongwe and Kafulafuta have recorded rainfall deficits and in some areas in excess of 50 per cent less rainfall than their seasonal averages.

Mr Speaker, weather and climate are changing right in front of our eyes. Strategies to create weather resilience programmes in the country must be accelerated. The adverse impact of climate variability and climate changes are obvious, as manifested in this 2018/2019 rainfall session or the previous sessions were parts of the country have experienced extreme weather conditions ranging from prolonged dry conditions to surplus rainfall leading to flooding. The dry conditions have damaged crops, especially over the southern half of the country, and have reduced crop production, while the floods have caused damage to infrastructure such as roads and bridges in the northern half of the country. All these impacts were given in the 2018/2019 rainy season forecast that we shared with all hon. Members of this House in October, 2018.

Mr Speaker, allow me to speak about the importance of weather and climate information as a basis for disaster preparedness. Climate information informs the measures taken to prepare for and reduce the effects of weather and climate induced disasters. This information helps us to predict and, where possible, prevent disasters, mitigate their impact on vulnerable populations and respond to and effectively cope with their consequences.

Mr Speaker, disaster preparedness is a multi-sectoral undertaking which starts with weather and climate information such as a seasonal rainfall forecast produced before the onset of the rainy season and other updates given in the season. As you may be aware, over 80 per cent of our disasters are caused by weather and climate events here in Zambia.

The weather and climate information produced by the Ministry of Transport and Communication is the major input in the DMMU structures from the national to the community levels. These are the structures that are used when disseminating early warning information. At provincial level, the DMMU has Provincial Disaster Management Committees which act as a clearing house for early warning information to the communities at risk. The Provincial Permanent Secretary is the chairperson of that committee. When there is an impending hazard such as floods, the provinces are informed who in turn disseminate to the district disaster management committees and then to satellite committees at community level using any available means of communication in the area. This could be a local radio station, text messaging or short messaging services (SMSs), television or engaging the at-risk community through our community sensitisation methods.

Mr Speaker, the House may wish to note that the Zambia Meteorological Department under my ministry is integral to all the operations of the DMMU, especially when it comes to access the weather and climate information and droughts and floods information. The preparedness and contingency plans that the DMMU prepares are based on the information that my ministry provides. The mandate of the DMMU under the Office of the Vice-President is to protect people's lives, properties and the environment from both human induced and natural hazards. Based on the weather and climate information that we provide, the DMMU issues early warning information to at-risk sectors of our communities.

Mr Speaker, as I conclude, let me inform the nation that my ministry will continue engaging and giving updates through community radio stations, Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) on both radio and television, including other electronic platforms such as e-mails, websites and the WhatsApp messages that we maintain. My Ministry is working hand-in-hand with colleagues from the Ministry of Agriculture and DMMU as well as other key stakeholders to continuously assess and give updates on the weather conditions across the country and the impacts, especially to the vulnerable amongst us.

Mr Speaker, I thank you.