

Statement of the KZN Provincial Executive Council on Recent Disaster Incidents and Other Related Matters

13 November 2019

The Provincial Executive Council of KwaZulu-Natal held its ordinary meeting on Wednesday, 13 November 2019.

The Provincial Executive received a preliminary report on the recent disaster incidents that have cut a swathe of destruction in various parts of the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Since October 2019, the province of KwaZulu-Natal has been experiencing extreme weather conditions, triggering severe thunderstorms, lightning strikes, gale force winds and heavy downpours which have wreaked havoc across the province. They have caused fatalities, injuries and inflicted major damage to households and public infrastructure.

These horrific disaster incidents were largely experienced in areas such as eThekweni, Abaqulusi, Jozini, uMgungundlovu, uMzinyathi, Ilembe, Harry Gwala, uThukela. The Provincial Executive noted that the report remains provisional at this stage, as detailed assessments to quantify the damage are still work in progress, with the latest recorded tornado incident.

The summary of the impact of the disaster incidents since October are as follows:

- 798 households were affected
- 14 fatalities have been reported, excluding the latest uMshwathi incident (assessments still ongoing)
- 19 injuries

uMshwathi Tornado

The Provincial Executive noted that the most dramatic weather-related incident took place yesterday at New Hanover (specifically in Thokozani and Mpolweni) in the Mshwathi local municipality, just outside Pietermaritzburg. Here a tornado ripped through the area, injuring scores of people and damaging homes and public infrastructure.

It was a frightening sight! Captured on video, the footage of the tornado swirling through the KZN countryside became viral in no time. It also bears testimony to the rapidly changing climate in our province and country.

The Provincial Executive extends message of condolences to the family of Sphelene Ndlovu (40) who passed away after a house collapsed on her as well as Nonhlanhla Buthelezi (64) who passed away after a tree was uprooted by the tornado and collapsed the entire house on her.

The Provincial Executive also wished the 18 people who were injured and are receiving medical attention from various health facilities a speedy recovery.

Disaster relief efforts

In response to the tornado, the Premier of KwaZulu-Natal Sihle Zikalala, together with the MEC for Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Sipho Hlomuka and the MEC for Finance Ravi Pillay, as well as the Mayors of uMgungundlovu and uMshwathi Municipalities, today visited the affected areas and the deceased families to lead relief efforts and commence mop-up operations.

The Preliminary Report received by the Provincial Executive indicates that huge damage has been inflicted on infrastructure, with several homes having roofs blown away and others having completely collapsed. Some roads have been washed away, while countless trees have been uprooted, with interruptions to the electricity supply.

Disaster teams remain on the ground and are working hard to provide support to the affected communities. The Government will provide a co-ordinated response through various departments

impacted, such as Human Settlements, Transport, Social Development, Education, Health, Public Works and municipalities, with Cogta as a coordinating department.

Relief efforts are being marshalled through the Joint Operations Centre that has been set up and to date food, blankets, mattresses and other urgent necessities have been provided. Most public facilities, such as churches and community halls, are being used to house those displaced by the violent storms.

The estimated damage will be known once the full assessments have been concluded but the damages are estimated to run into millions of rand. As the assessments continue, figures continue to change as new homes are being added to the list.

The Government welcomes support from various NGOs and private sector institutions willing to partner and volunteer support to the affected communities

Issuance of documents to victims

The Department of Home Affairs will be assisting with the issuing of temporary IDs and certificates and all relevant documents to all affected family members who will undergo a thorough authentication process. SASSA and the Department of Education are also supporting the victims, including by ensuring that children get uniforms to go to school and that those busy with exams are adequately supported.

Drought Relief for livestock farmers

With the province of KwaZulu-Natal experiencing severe drought challenge, the Provincial Executive noted that this drought has negatively impacted on livestock and crop production. Farmers particularly in the Northern areas of KZN such as uMkhanyakude, Amajuba, uThukela, and Zululand are the most affected.

In order to lessen the burden and mitigate the impact of the drought the Provincial Executive resolved to inject an amount to the tune of R20million through the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. This money is part of the emergency relief support:

- R17 Million will be set aside to procure livestock feed;
- R3million will go towards medicines and vaccinations;

Translocation of Black Rhinos to Malawi

Under the Black Rhino Range Expansion Project, that seeks to ensure the survival of the endangered Black Rhinos and their limited genetic diversity, the Provincial Executive approved the programme by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife which has been trans-locating Black Rhinos to various countries for the last 13 years. This year, 2019, Ezemvelo is trans-locating eighteen black Rhinos to Liwonde National Park in Malawi. This trans-location is fully compliant with our strategy to preserve our biodiversity and sustain our comparative advantage as a province. This is part of the Memorandum of Understanding that exists between South Africa and Malawi. The initiative has the blessing of the National Department of Environmental Affairs, Fisheries and Forestry through an MOU signed between SA and Malawi.

Religious sector, KZN Government in new partnership to fight resurgence of HIV/AIDS

The Provincial Executive Council has welcomed a pledge of support from the KwaZulu-Natal Council of Churches (KZNCC), which has vowed to lend its weight to curb the resurgence of HIV/Aids in the province.

The Government of KwaZulu-Natal is worried about the incidence of new HIV infections, particularly among women aged between 15 – 24.

The KZNCC made a presentation which outlined its multi-pronged strategy to stem the tide of new HIV/AIDS infections.

The strategy will focus on, among others, the following:

- Projects and programmes to facilitate moral regeneration;
- New economic opportunities to make girl-children more self-sufficient
- A new and improved social cohesion programme
- Opportunities to collaborate on economic opportunities for young people
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Tomorrow, religious leaders will visit the disaster-hit area of Mpolweni in uMshwati Municipality, to provide support including psycho-spiritual healing, meeting with local churches and leaders.

Conclusion

The Provincial Executive commends the work that is being done by the emergency services and the selfless sacrifice of the teams working through the night in danger zones to assist the affected victims of the disaster incidents across the province. The Provincial Executive assures affected communities that all the necessary support will be provided to the communities as they begin to piece together their lives again.

At the same time, all residents of KwaZulu-Natal are requested to heed the weather and travel advisories issued by the South African Weather Service and their local authorities. The weather forecast at this point indicates heavy rains tomorrow and during Friday.

The Provincial Executive has also commend the leadership of the Premier and MECs who in light of this disaster and the scale of the devastation to the lives of our fellow citizens, delayed the Executive Council to lead relief efforts and mounted a spirited response to this tragedy.

We ask our good Lord to grant comfort to the victims and their families at this time of grief and may the souls of all those departed fellow citizens rest in peace!

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