

MONDAY 7TH APRIL 2014

The Speaker, Sir Allan Kemakeza took the Chair at 9.40am.

Prayers.

ATTENDANCE

All were present with the exception of the Ministers of: Finance and Treasury; Education and Human resources development; Communication and Civil Aviation; Police, National security and Correctional Services; Foreign Affairs and External trade; Agriculture and Livestock; Health and Medical Services; Mines and Energy; Infrastructure Development; National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace; Provincial Government; Women, Youth and Children's Affairs and the Member for North East Guadalcanal, West Are Are; Fataleka; Central Guadalcanal; North West Guadalcanal; East Honiara; Malaita Outer Islands; Maringe-Kokota; North Malaita; Temotu Pele; East Are Are; South New Georgia-Rendova/Tetepari; Hograno-Kia/Havulei; East Choiseul; North Guadalcanal; North New Georgia;

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr Speaker: Honorable Members, I understand that the question without notice was asked by the Member of Parliament for Central Honiara. He has consulted the Minister responsible and therefore permission is given for the Member of Parliament for Central Honiara to ask the question without notice.

QUESTION WITHOUT NOTICE

Mr JOHN MOFFAT FUGUI (*Central Honiara*) to the Minister for Environment, Climate Change & Disaster Management: Mr Speaker, thank you for granting me permission in view of the natural disaster that struck the country, particularly in Honiara for which the three members of Honiara constituencies are responsible and would like to ask the government through the Minister for Environment.

What are the stages of preparation in terms of the natural disaster that has struck this country? What has the government done and is doing so that people know and not only

depend on the radio but hear directly from Parliament, the highest law making body in the country so that they are informed so that we can progress from here to there, in particular here in Honiara where the three of us MPs are responsible.

I understand that here in Central Honiara there are about 500 plus families that are affected. Can the Minister inform Parliament the things in preparation and what are we doing to address the effects of the disaster that has struck us last week?

Hon BRADLEY TOVOSIA (*Minister for Environment, Climate Change & Disaster Management*): On Friday, I as the Minister for Environment and Disaster Management have declared a state of disaster for Guadalcanal and Honiara. Also on Friday, the Cabinet approved a Contingency Warrant of \$5million purposely for the disaster.

In terms of the sequence of things that have happened, on Saturday, the Prime Minister and myself have gone around visiting the evacuation centers where we actually saw the situation at the centers. Yes, we can acknowledge to this country that there are a lot of people in the centers that are really in need of help from the government.

I think there are many things that have happened which we have seen ourselves. We have seen what has happened to the Mataniko Bridge which is really devastating. Many people have attested to the fact that they have never seen a disaster at this scale. But we cannot stop natural disasters from happening as it is not under our control and making. But what the Ministry of Environment through the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) has done is supply food to the victims. I have physically went around myself as Minister responsible because I wanted to know what is actually going on and have seen myself that food and basic needs such as water and foods have been given out to the camps. I think more details of what is happening are with the NDMO and will be provided later since I have just received notice of this question from my colleague this morning. So the details of what has happened will be made known maybe in our next sitting. But for now, my Ministry has tried its best by working through NDMO with other agencies and NGOs. I also would like thank people who have provided help such as the SDA Dorcas ladies, Catholic mothers and individual business people who are assisting us with the current problem in our country. Other disaster plans will be put in place later, but I think what is happening now is food and basic needs given to victims who living in the centres.

Mr Johnley Hatimoana: Just a supplementary question. We understand people affected by the flooding or the natural disaster are those living along the Mataniko River and perhaps the Lungga River and are now accommodated in various schools. However, these schools are supposed to resume classes today. Are there plans to accommodate victims in the short or medium term so as to allow the schools to commence?

Hon Bradley Tovosia: I think since a state of disaster has been declared, in the meantime we are still going to accommodate people in those places. I say this because some of the camps accommodate about a thousand victims and therefore moving people to other locations would be another issue. Temporarily, we are going to accommodate people in current locations and assess the situations and if situations improve people living nearby can start going back to their homes and we will find other ways to deal with the rest. But in the meantime those schools have to remain close because this is a give and take problem, we cannot just allow people to return and live along the rivers when there are no houses for them to live in.

Mr DAVID DAY PACHA (*South Guadalcanal*): I understand that the Minister has declared a state of disaster on Friday which covers Honiara and Guadalcanal. I have heard the Minister talked about the situation in Honiara. Are there any updates from the Minister about Guadalcanal, in particular the Weather Coast?

Hon Bradley Tovosia: Yes, I have received a couple of texts from people or from what I might say as intending candidates of that constituency (as this is election time) saying that South Guadalcanal is also affected. Yes, there are reports coming from that area but the Ministry will always do its assessments first. The Guadalcanal Province has a disaster group that is doing assessment before assistance is given. Guadalcanal is under the declaration and so South Guadalcanal is covered as well.

Mr JAMES TORA (*Ulawal/Ugi*): A supplementary question. Can the Minister confirm to this honourable House whether assessment teams have already been deployed to areas that have been badly affected?

Hon Bradley Tovosia: As I have mentioned earlier on, I would like to thank Non Governmental Organisation's and individuals who actually volunteered to do assessments and so yes they have been around. The Ministry greatly appreciates any volunteers as we are just a small ministry in terms of workforce and having volunteers would really be helpful for us because disaster usually cover huge areas and a lot of people are affected. I would like to make a call to this country that if anybody is willing to help to conduct surveys and such would be really helpful.

Mr MILNER TOZAKA (*North Vella La Vella*): Maybe this question is specifically to the Prime Minister. I appreciate when I heard Australia has responded to assist us. Since this is an emergency, the only people who could assist us are aid donors. I would like to know what our plans are in calling a meeting with them this week so that we sit around the table and ask them

to assist us. I think we should have this meeting this week while things are still hot. What is the plan of the government in doing that?

Hon GORDON DARCY LILO (*Prime Minister*): As the Minister of Environment has stated, on Friday the State of Disaster was declared over Honiara and Guadalcanal and as a result of that declaration, the immediate thing the National Disaster Council did was basically rely on assessments made by the Honiara City and Council, the National Disaster including the Police on situations around here in Honiara and the nearby areas of both the western part of the town boundaries and the eastern part towards the Guadalcanal Plains. And the first thing that has to happen is basically the evacuation of people that have been affected. Right now as stated by the Minister, there are more than 2000 displaced people and victims accommodated in the various evacuation centres and care centres throughout Honiara, and we have visited those centres on Saturday.

The next thing that has to be done and has been carried out by both the National Disaster Management office was what the Minister alluded to earlier, including certified relief agencies/organizations, is the delivery of emergency relief assistance to all the care centres. Work will continue today in trying to identify whether or not there are evacuation centres in the Guadalcanal Plains and other parts of Guadalcanal for relief assistance to be extended to them.

On Friday afternoon, Cabinet met and has resourced the National Disaster Council, as the Minister quite rightly pointed out, to undertake immediate intervention in delivering emergency relief assistance. We have also held discussions with selected donors on Friday including Australia. This morning we are going to meet with New Zealand, but both Australia and New Zealand have obtained assessment reports through the National Disaster Council and have responded quite immediately through the various relief assistances they have already announced. As of last night, military aircrafts from both Australia and New Zealand have arrived in the country to deliver relief assistances and also provided certain personnel to help with further logistics and needs assessments that we need to undertake.

In our discussions with these donors, we highlighted three things that are important right now or are our priorities. First is relief assistance and the second thing is to help out with short term assessment of the kind of maintenance required for the infrastructures within Honiara.

As you would understand, one of the major infrastructures in Honiara is the Mataniko Bridge, which almost collapsed or just about to collapse and needs to be restored. And therefore the effort we have made is get the Ministry of Infrastructure to work on stabilizing this bridge. If this bridge collapses, policing in town would be in real danger and the normal flow of social and economic services would be really affected. That is where the priority focus is concentrated for now and the Minister of Infrastructure and others are working very hard making sure the bridge is stabilized.

What we have instructed the National Disaster Council (NDC) is that in spite of the disaster now in our hands, normal economic activities must continue - imports and exports must continue. You would also know that all appropriate institutions for us to trade both internationally and within the country are basically out of Honiara. We have therefore been very careful on how we put out instructions, including asking donors to focus on immediate needs assessments. The military plane that arrived last night brought in military and civil engineers to help us assess the situation of the bridge, including other short term measures that can be taken to erect a bridge to ease the traffic situation in Honiara.

The other infrastructure that we have also prioritized is the reopening of the airport. As you would know, yesterday domestic services throughout the country have resumed as well as international flights have also resumed yesterday afternoon. The military has also brought in puppy lights, which are specialized navigational lights making it possible for planes to land at night and I think they are working on it right now.

The major concentration we will be looking at right now is to try and restore bridges at both the eastern and western sides of the city. Bridges and culverts have been washed away in Honiara as well as in the Guadalcanal Plains. I am sure all of you may have heard on the radio that access to our only gold mine has been destroyed. The bridge there is standing alone like an island because the river has changed its course. What we have done last night is deploy of members of the Police Response Team (PRT) to go and maintain security up there because that asset belongs to the state. It is a state asset, a state economic infrastructure and therefore we have taken measures to secure the mine site.

We have been notified today about the situation where the investor tried to activate the force majeure closest to the lease. We are currently talking to them that in spite of the disaster, we are not going to allow this investment left unattended to but we are going to put all measures to secure it, and it is our determination to have operations recommence at the mine site.

As soon as all the reports are made this week, we will be calling on for a donors meeting. But our immediate priority is to restore infrastructures in the city - the roads and bridges. We will also have to now seriously start plan about the situation of our hospital. Relocation of the hospital has to be top priority now as well as looking at upgrading the airport runway and the terminal. The domestic terminal is filled with mud from the rains. We know that the location where it is right now is quite critical.

The Member for Ngella has asked a question on what we are going to do with our displaced people who are now occupying schools and other centres. We have issued instructions to the National Disaster Council to work with the churches. One option is to operate through the churches. We know that our churches have big compounds. Respective churches can bring people to their compounds and the government will provide resources to look after the people. We can also use churches to undertake trauma counseling for people.

That is an option that has been given to the National Disaster Council and they are now working on it.

As we all know in the past, the NDMO is a very bureaucratic institution and always does things not quite to the satisfaction of people. Previously we have been dealing with disasters that are quite far or distanced from Honiara, the centre. But now disaster is right in the heart of Honiara and we have to put priority in restoring and maintaining services here. Secondly, we have to make sure the behaviors of our people are properly managed by applying the right tools. Not necessarily through monetized ways but use as much the institutions to manage the behaviors of our people.

Last night we continue to ask the police to continue maintain the situation at the bridge. I want to say that we will not allow heavy machines to cross the bridge because it will collapse if we do that. This is where we need to have a little bit of understanding from our people. Those of us from the eastern side whether we can just park our vehicles at Lawson Tama and walk. Those of us from the western end whether we can just park our vehicles at the Ports Authority and walk to the market as we cannot put any more pressure on the bridge as it will only cause frustration and we will end up with a situation where the orderly movement and flow of activities within this very congestive infrastructure will raise unnecessary frustrations on our people. That is the understanding we have and continue to ask the police to come out and announce and seek understanding from our people, also including us Members of Parliament. I think there are some Members of Parliament who are stuck on the other side and we just have to stop there and walk here.

I do not think it would be any hurt at all to spend a little bit of time to walk a kilometre to town and back. It is a good time to save money too so instead of doing shopping in bulk, just come with a small plastic bag for shopping and go back home.

We have visited the camps and I hope that when NDC asks churches to assist, maybe we would be able to slowly shift people from the schools to other compounds where we will have credible and reputable institutions and organizations to look after our people. But we will meet with donors any time this week. Thank you.

Mr John Moffat Fugui: Before I thank the Minister of Environment and the Prime Minister for their comments, I want to make a few comments. The first is to give a decent burial to our people who have died, and secondly to make sure there is water in Honiara. This morning I came without having a shower as there is no water in our area. Water is very important in times of disaster and so we must ensure water is given to the camps and the places that have no water. Thirdly, we must inform the schools that if there is need to have another one or two weeks break, and we should. Fourthly, for us in Central Honiara we must make sure to give the koa-hill people a land for relocation as that place is not good for habitation anymore after the disaster.

Finally, we must make sure that there is vigorous flow of information to Members of Parliament through Parliament so that we are aware of what is going on in terms of the government is doing as well as us working together.

On the same note, I want to thank the very hardworking Minister for Environment, especially in this time of disaster and the Prime Minister for giving information about the disaster, and to ask them not to stop letting us know what is going on so that we can help. I thank you all the same.

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr. GORDON DARCY LILO (*Prime Minister*): Early this morning before I came here, I had a call from the Leader of Opposition asking me if we can give today to Members of Parliament to attend to the situation our citizens have gone through as a result of the disaster. I concur to that suggestion in view of the fact that a good number of our constituencies have been affected and are now living in evacuation camps here in town.

I think I need to make this clarification as well. There is an article in the paper this morning that the Government has advanced funds for relief. For the information of the public, what we have released is basically the first tranche of what is called the constituency development funds for 2014 to enable Members meet the needs of their people who are faced with the situation here in town. Relief assistance is a matter for the National Disaster Council. I therefore want the public not to unnecessarily use such information to create states of confusion here in town as we go through this difficult time.

Please respect our leaders, they are in charge of our constituencies and so work with them in how best we can deal with members of our constituencies who are a good part of our community here in the capital that are facing this situation we are going through at this time. That will give us a little bit of time today to attend to constituency matters in that way.

The second point and a good one is raised by the Member for Central Honiara. The Deputy Prime Minister is working on an announcement very shortly to give recognition to our people who have been lost as a result of the problem we are experiencing at this time. And so it would be good for us to have this day to do that and tomorrow we can come back again and continue with the normal government business.

The Leader called me, including the Chairman of the Bills and Legislation Committee that they are caught on the other side of the road, and that is why I think it would be good that as of this afternoon the Police must try and control the traffic through the bridge because that is the only bridge we are going to rely on as the other one has been washed away. Those of us on this side wanting to go to the other side must be prepared to park our vehicles somewhere safe and we walk to the other side, get transport from the other side and do business on the other side and then return.

Buses, taxis and other commuters that are available, please let us extend good services to our people so that the movement of public and other economic services in the country can be done in a more understandable way. That is as much I would like to say. Might I also add to a point made by the Member for Central Honiara that the legislation we currently have, the National Disaster Council is to manage a disaster. We need to look at something that is more developmental, and I am just thinking in my mind that maybe we should consider the concept of disaster risk reduction measures as part of our long term plan to respond to disaster and also to deal with a situation of disaster in the future. Some of our areas now would have to be declared as absolutely uninhabitable places. But this is a long term plan we need to work on. With those remarks I thank you for giving me this opportunity to make this statement.

At your direction I can move a motion now and the motion is that I move that the House do now adjourn.

The House adjourned at 10.15am