

**ADDRESS BY HON. KWAMENA BARTELS, MP, MINISTER FOR THE INTERIOR, AT A PRESS
CONFERENCE ON THE DISASTER IN THE THREE NORTHERN REGIONS AND WESTERN
REGION ON 27TH SEPTEMBER, 2007 AT THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND
NATIONAL ORIENTATION PRESS CENTRE IN ACCRA**

**Madam Chairperson,
Hon. Ministers and Distinguished Members of the Committee,
Distinguished Invited Guests,
Our Friends from the Inky Fraternity,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

1. INTRODUCTION

It is with a high sense of urgency and priority that I welcome you all to this important press briefing on the recent flood disaster in the three northern regions and Enchi in the Western Region.

2. BACKGROUND

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, in August and early September 2007, Ghana experienced heavy and persistent rains which caused floods in the three northern regions, and parts of Western and Volta Regions. Unfortunately the situation was not limited to Ghana alone. Our sister countries in most part of the African continent also have had their fair share.

In Ghana, what is ironic is the fact that over the last couple of months, we as a country have been praying ceaselessly for the rains for farming activities, and for a rise of the water level of the Akosombo Dam. However, considering the extent of the rains, Ladies and gentlemen, I am being tempted to say that God has 'over answered' our prayers.

3.0 Statistics on Destruction

The floods have caused immense damage to our country. These include widespread human, material and environmental losses, and a decimation of population of the affected areas. As you are aware Government's initial assessment provided us initial figures on destruction. The situation is still evolving and I present the updated statistics on the disaster. However we should bear in mind that as Government continue to undertake further assessment these figures may change in the future

3.1 Deaths

Ladies and gentlemen, at this point permit me to give you an overview of the extent of destruction caused by the disaster. In all, Fifty-six **(56) deaths** have been recorded and the break-down is as follows: thirty-one **(31)** persons in the Upper East Region, fifteen **(15)** persons in the Northern Region and ten **(10)** persons in Upper West Region respectively.

3.2 Houses

Many houses in the affected areas totalling **34,336** have been destroyed with over **15,069** in the Upper East, **18,167** in the Northern and **1,100** in the Upper West.

3.3 Internally Displaced Persons

The destruction of houses has occasioned about **332,548** displaced people with **100,703** in the Upper East Region, **228,812** in the Northern Region and **3,033** in the Upper West Region.

The promptness of Government response and the resilient nature of our extended family system caring for its own has made it possible for substantial number of these people to be accommodated by relatives and friends within the communities temporarily. This has resulted in a situation where we are having limited number of displaced persons being kept in community structures such as schools, churches and camps. This is in sharp contrast to what normally happens in other parts of the world and we have to thank God for endowing us with such a wonderful cultural practice. Consequently the ill effects of large displacement of people to public places have been very limited.

3.4 Roads, Bridges and Culverts

In terms of roads, a total of one hundred and thirty one (**131**) trunk and feeder roads with a total length of one thousand five hundred and ten (**1,510**) km were affected. These roads have either been made impassable, washed-away or badly damaged. The Northern Region is the most seriously affected with a total of fifty three (**53**) roads totalling six hundred and sixty (**660**) km. This is followed by the Upper East having a total of fifty four (**54**) roads with a length of five hundred and forty two (**542**) km. The Upper West which is relatively least affected, has twenty four (**24**) with a length of three hundred and eight (**308**) km.

Ladies and gentlemen, bridges and culverts in these areas were not spared. A total of seventy (**70**) bridges and culverts were affected, fifty eight (**58**) in the Upper East, eleven (**11**) in the Upper West and one (**1**) in the Northern Region. The main ones being the Kulungungu Bridge linking Bawku to Burkina Faso, and Bawku-Garu Bridge.

3.5 Farms and Livestock

The floods have also affected one of the major socio-economic activities in the area. In all, **70,526 hectares** with a production potential of **144,430 metric tonnes** were affected. The Northern Region recorded **58,055 hectares**, Upper East – **12,221 hectares** and Upper West – **250 hectares**. Also, a substantial number of livestock were lost. The situation has been compounded by the massive destruction of dams.

The destruction of food stock, both early and late crops of the people of the affected areas indicates that these people will have no food this year and next year. Ladies and gentlemen, this is a serious problem which is affecting over three (3) million populations living in the three Northern Regions.

3.6 Health, Water and Sanitation

In the areas of health, water and sanitation the major problems relate to lack of clean drinking water as a result of contamination of all water sources; inaccessibility of health facilities as a result of destruction of roads and bridges; and exposure to weather and disease carrying insects including the black flies as a result of stagnation.

4. THE CASE OF ENCHI IN THE WESTERN REGION AND OTHER AREAS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is important to note that apart from the three (3) Northern Regions, other parts of the country have also been affected by the floods. Of particular interest is Enchi and surrounding communities within the Aowin-Suaman District in the Western Region. Here our assessment has revealed that over five hundred and eighty (**580**) houses have been destroyed rendering over eight thousand (**8,000**) people homeless.

Beyond what the Governmental structures at the Regional and District levels have done, His Excellency the President during his tour of the three Northern Regions personally instructed the Inter-Ministerial Task Force to also pay special attention to the situation in the Western Region. The Task Force has taken cognisance of this directive and first consignment of relief items through NADMO has been sent to the people, and as we speak more items are being dispatched from the NADMO National Warehouse to the affected communities.

With respect to the situation in the other parts of the country particularly in the Volta and Eastern Regions, Government assessment has established that the scale of destruction has been minimal. However, through its Regional and District Disaster Management structures, Government will continue to actively monitoring the situation.

5. GOVERNMENT ACTION

5.1 ASSESSMENTS

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, Government demonstrated leadership when the issue of the disaster was brought to its knowledge by immediately sending a ministerial team to undertake an initial assessment of the situation. This was followed by a Vice Presidential Team and then a Presidential Team. The Results of these assessments led His Excellency the President to declare the three (3) Northern Regions as a Disaster Zone.

5.2 ESTABLISHMENT OF TASK FORCE

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, it is important to mention that on the basis of the assessment report of the Ministerial Team, his Excellency the President, established an Inter-Ministerial Task Force to serve as a strategic focal point to ensure a holistic and coordinated approach to the management of the disaster. The Task Force which started work on 1st September 2007 was formally inaugurated on Friday 14 Sept 07.

Also, it is important to indicate that whilst all these assessments were ongoing, the National Disaster Management mechanism was actively operational. On the instructions of His Excellency the President, Regional and District Disaster Management Task Forces were established under the leadership of the respective Regional Ministers and District Chief Executives.

5.3 RELIEF ITEMS DISTRIBUTED BY GOVERNMENT

Government after evaluating the situation approved an amount of ₦6.1 billion for the acquisition of additional emergency relief items. This has since been complemented with the establishment of the National Disaster Relief Fund in which government has deposited an amount of ₦ 61 billion for use to bring relief to the affected areas within the short and the medium terms.

The Inter-Ministerial Task Force through National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO) had and continues to distribute emergency life saving relief items to the affected people. So far, four (4) consignments of relief have been supplied and additional purchases made up of 30,000bags of cement, 15,000 packets of roofing sheets, 12,000 packets of roofing nails, 57,000 pieces of hardwood, 600 bales of used clothing, 90,000 pieces of polymats, 15,000 pieces of foam mattresses, 90,000pieces of blankets, 15,000 plastic buckets, 15,000 plastic basins, 15,000 pieces of plastic cups and plates, 10,000 pieces of mosquito nets, 25,000 bags of rice, 10,000 bags of maize, 1500 cartons of cooking oil are being distributed. Even as we speak tonnes of relief items continue to be sent by road and air to the affected area.

These have been complemented by various relief items from other Governments through their embassies, the UN System, NGOs, Religious organisations, the private sector and individuals.

6. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

Ladies and Gentlemen, in all these Government saw the need to involve our development partners both local and foreign in the management of the disaster.

As a result, a series of interactions with all stakeholders were undertaken to map up a strategy for a concerted approach towards the management of the disaster. For instance, we had meetings with the International Donor Community, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Religious Leadership and the Private Sector. And at these meetings it was agreed to undertake a joint assessment to ascertain the extent of disaster in terms of the level of destruction and needs of the victim as well as restoration of infrastructure. The principal object was to give the stakeholders a firsthand view of the situation on the ground and also to acquaint them with Government's response and challenges in the management of the disaster.

7. THE JOINT ASSESSMENT

This Joint Assessment took place for the period Monday 17 – Thursday 20 September 2007. The team consisted of a Government, UN System, NGOs, Ghana Private Sector, Religious bodies and the Media.

During the three-day assessment period, the team undertook the following activities; Aerial view of the affected areas, Interaction with the victims, Interaction with opinion leaders, Interaction with political leaders, Interaction with NGOs in the field, Inspection of infrastructure.

At the end of the assessment the team confirmed the findings of the various Government assessments. A Joint Report from the assessment will be issued later today.

8. DONATIONS

As you are aware, immediately that His Excellency the President declared the three Northern Regions as a disaster zone the Inter-Ministerial Task Force launched an appeal for assistance in support of government efforts. It is gratifying to note that the response has so far been very encouraging. The list of donors ranges from governments through corporate bodies to individuals and the comprehensive list will be made available to the press in due course. At this point Distinguish ladies and gentlemen, let me take this opportunity to thank all the donors for their support which has been swift and compassionate. We hope that those of you who have not donated anything yet will take a cue from the good gesture of the donors.

9. FURTHER GOVERNMENT ACTION

Government in concert with our development partners both local and foreign, both governmental and non-governmental and both corporate and individual, will continue to demonstrate exceptional leadership in the management of the situation so as to achieve the objective of bringing immediate and measured relief to the affected areas.

As you are aware, these issues have immediate, short, medium and long term components and the central theme running through them all is strategic planning. Indeed, I want to give you the assurance that Government will factor all these components into its relief management strategy.

10. CONCLUSION

Ladies and gentlemen we are faced with a disaster and what is even worrying is the fact that successful recovery from this situation is definitely going to be a difficult path fraught with dangers.

Ladies and Gentlemen, therefore, permit me to conclude my speech with an appeal to my fellow countrymen. The plight of the people of the affected areas should be a matter of concern to all. It is therefore crucial that all suspicions, quarrels and disputes are set aside for the unity of the country. This is not the

time for politicisation of issues. This not the time for tribalisation of issues. It is certainly not the time for unwarranted criticisms. It is a time to unite to deal with the calamity that has befallen our people.

I therefore wish to appeal to all and sundry - chiefs, opinion leaders, politicians, private sector and the international donor community to partner Government to bring relief to the people, particularly women and school children as immediately as possible whilst at the same time we strategise to tackle the medium to long term enormous rebuilding task ahead of us. Divided we will fail but together, we can meet the challenge.

On this note, ladies and gentlemen thank you and May God Bless Us All as we work together to bring comfort to our suffering people.