

KZN floods detail the effect of climate change, Cogta minister says

The devastating floods in KwaZulu-Natal and other parts of the country are the beginnings of South Africa feeling the effects of climate change, says Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta) minister Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma.



A petrol tanker trailer lies on the beach after heavy rains caused flooding, in Durban, South Africa, 12 April 2022. | Reuters/Rogan Ward

Addressing reporters on yesterday, the minister said the torrential rain experienced in the province last week were the worst the country had ever experienced.

On Monday (18 April) night, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced cabinet's decision to declare a National State of Disaster. The declaration of the National State of Disaster takes into account the need to augment existing measures undertaken by organs of state to deal with the national disaster and allows the mobilisation of resources to support the various interventions.

The declaration is in terms of Section 27(1) of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Act No. 57 of 2002) due to the magnitude and severity of the damage caused by the severe weather events in various municipal areas of KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and other provinces.



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"In 24 hours, the province experienced 300 and 400 millimetres of rain. In Durban for instance in February, which is the wettest month, we normally get about 102 millimetres of rain in the whole month," said the minister. This, she said, confirmed that "climate change is here"

"The scientists have been telling us that the eastern part of the country is going to be wetter and will have frequent floods. The western part of the country is going to be drier and we will have frequent droughts. And maybe we thought it's something that is still in the distant future.

"But if we look at what has just happened over the last five years, in KwaZulu-Natal we had floods in 2018, in 2020 and we have had floods now in 2022. Of course each flood gets worse than the previous one. So clearly, climate change is with us and we are beginning to feel the effects of it," Dlamini-Zuma added.

Extending condolences to all those who lost their loved ones, the minister said she hoped that those who have missing loved ones will be found soon saying "it is very important for us to lay our love ones to rest and know where they are resting".

Government, private sector join hands to provide relief to affected communities

She said government was doing all in its might to assist in finding those who are still missing. Above the 440 confirmed lost lives, the floods left 40,000 people homeless when 4,000 homes were destroyed. She said government was encouraged by the prevailing spirit of ubuntu.

"We'd like to thank the individual citizens, NGOs, private sector companies, traditional leaders, who have rallied to comfort those affected," she said. The floods have resulted in the loss of human life and damage to infrastructure.

"The Eastern Cape has also had floods and loss of life and also destruction of infrastructure. Other provinces are experiencing heavier rains than normal. But also the impact of these floods [is] way beyond the province (KwaZulu-Natal), and so it became very important that the national government comes on board."



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Dlamini-Zuma said classification from a provincial to a national disaster allows for the coordination and rallying of the entire nation, government and also international support. She said it strengthens the commitment of national government departments to fulfil its role in providing relief recovery and rehabilitation to affected communities.

"But that does not mean that the province and the local government must now relax. They must still do what they need to do. It signals that the government as a whole intends to deal with the impact of this severe weather in KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and other provinces in a holistic manner through an integrated and coordinated approach across the spheres of government.

Through the District Development Model, she said, "all three spheres of government must... use their budgets in an integrated [manner].

"In dealing with this disaster, that is what is going to happen. Nobody should build back in the riverbanks... in flood plains. It means [that] as we build back, we should build back better. We must strengthen institutional arrangements to ensure that we assist and protect the public as the law says, provide relief to the public, protect property, prevent and combat any disruption to life in a destructive nature and other effects of this disaster. So this has been gazetted and therefore, we will be now working accordingly," Dlamini-Zuma said.



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Contingency arrangements

The minister called on all organs of state, the private sector and civil society to further increase support to existing structures to implement contingency arrangements and ensure that measures are put in place to effectively deal with the impact of the disaster.

Ministers, premiers, MECs and mayors will also provide regular updates to the nation on interventions being undertaken. National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC) head Dr Mmaphaka Tau said eight operational task teams have been set-up to deal with the effects of the floods.

They are:

- Health and Medical Services team - Department of Health.
- Humanitarian Relief task team - Department of Social Development
- Integrated flood risks and early warnings - NDMC
- Food and nutrition task team - Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development
- Communications and community mobilisation task team - Government Communication and Information Service.
- Infrastructure intervention task teams - Department of Public Works and infrastructure with Municipal Infrastructure Support Agent.
- Security and Emergency Search and Rescue task team - South African Police Service.
- Funding and monitoring and evaluation task teams - National Treasury with Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation.

He said these teams were being activated. "They will start to function effectively. We have come up with a model that will ensure that they are replicated at provincial and municipal level," he said.

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