



MEDIA STATEMENT: FREE STATE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT RESPONDS TO THE FICKSBURG TORNADO DISASTER

The small town of Ficksburg, Meqheleng, was swept by a vicious tornado on 2 October 2011. The most affected areas are Zone 7 and Zone 8. Within 30 minutes, the area was shattered by heavy rain and storms, damaging 122 houses and affecting an estimated 630 people, including 121 children. Infrastructure such as roads, power lines, property and natural vegetation were affected.

In response, the Free State Provincial government led by Premier ES Magashule speedily activated a Joint Operations Centre (JOC) to coordinate response activities. At the same time a Venue Operations Centre (VOC) was established to facilitate response activities which includes *in loco site* assessments, verification, quantification of the extent of the damage for immediate and long term response.

The JOC mobilized essential stakeholders including the Thabo Mofutsanyana District Municipality, SAPS, ESKOM, South African National Civic Organisation, the Cuban technical delegation employed by the Department of Human Settlements, Red Cross, Rotary International, Save the Children, SASSA, Department of Human Settlements, Emergency Medical Services, Working on Fire, Home Affairs, Department of Social Development, COGTA National Disaster Management Centre and COGTA Provincial Disaster Management Centre. The JOC coordinated the details regarding people affected, fatalities, injuries and infrastructure as well as benevolent donations.

DISASTER IMPACT

People Affected

- An estimated 630 individuals, including 121 children were affected and displaced.

Fatalities

- A 9 year old boy, Thabane Mokhekhe, has been killed, due to tornado induced collapse of the walls of a house he was sleeping in.

Injuries

- 42 people suffered injuries and were hospitalized for one day mostly with all but 7 discharged on the following day.
- There are currently only three casualties still in hospital and these happen to be members of the family of the deceased minor.

Infrastructure

The technical team of the Municipality together with the JOC is still in the process of verifying infrastructure damage however as indicated above, roads and property have been affected.



Disaster Response

The Premier together with the MEC for COGTA, Ms MG Qabathe and the MEC for Health Ms F Ngubentombi, visited the affected community for first hand observation and impact assessment on the day following the disaster, 3 October 2011. Commenting on the disaster the Premier emphasized the following points as key for immediate attention:

- Proper accommodation for the affected:
The Premier indicated that temporary accommodation for displaced families must be the church and school halls that had been identified as these are more secure than temporary structures such as tents, seeing more rainy weather had been predicted. The community however seems to prefer rebuilding their shacks; which is what they are currently doing. Only a few have responded to the offer of accommodation in halls.
- Proper coordination of food, clothes and other daily basic needs to ensure that all affected people are catered for sufficiently.
- Special care for the children and the elderly.
- Assistance and counseling for the bereaved family as well as other affected families
- The Setsoto Municipality has offered financial assistance for the burial of Thabane Mokhekhe.

Long term plans for disaster recovery

A meeting of the provincial Cabinet is held today, Wednesday 5th October in Setsoto Municipality focusing on the impact of the disaster. All members of the Executive Council will visit the disaster site to do own first hand assessment and jointly they will plan on the immediate and long term relief and recovery measures.

The Premier has sent a memo to the Presidency requesting that this area be declared a disaster area so that relevant resources could be channeled accordingly. The Setsoto Local Municipality Mayor is in the process of establishing a relief fund to channel financial assistance.

The Premier indicated that an integrated and sustainable approach to the disaster recovery planning and implementation will be taken with a view to long lasting recovery and relief. An established engineering company will be appointed for reconstruction of houses, for instance. Overall infrastructure needs in the area will also be addressed in this recovery plan. Issues of basic sanitation and other key services will also be addressed so that this becomes a holistic recovery plan that also addresses community needs that were identified even before the disaster struck.



Time frames

The Executive Council currently sitting will determine the time frames as per identified key priorities.

END

Enquiries:

Mondli Mvambi
082 0433744

Senne Bogatsu
082 774 1014