



**STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA
ON THE DECLARATION OF A NATIONAL STATE OF DISASTER
TO RESPOND TO WIDESPREAD FLOODING**

**UNION BUILDINGS, TSHWANE
18 APRIL 2022**

My Fellow South Africans,

Over the last week, communities along parts of our eastern coast have been devastated by catastrophic flooding.

On the 11th and 12th of April, parts of KwaZulu-Natal received between 200 and 400 mm of rainfall in a 24 hour period.

All parts of the province were affected by the rainfall, with the entire Ethekewini metro and the districts of iLembe, Ugu, King Cetshwayo and uMgungundlovu being most affected.

Heavy rainfall and flooding have also been experienced in the Eastern Cape, particularly in the districts of Alfred Nzo, Joe Gqabi and OR Tambo, where roads, bridges and houses have been extensively damaged, especially in the Port St Johns' area.

To date, a total of 443 people are known to have lost their lives in KwaZulu-Natal.

Approximately 48 people are missing or unaccounted for.

Last week, I and a number of Ministers, accompanied by Premier Sihle Zikalala and MECs, as well as the Executive Mayor and councillors, visited several affected families.

They told us heart-breaking stories about children, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, grandparents and neighbours being swept away as their homes crumbled under the pressure of the flood waters.

There are few words of comfort that can ease the anguish and the torment of those people who have lost loved ones.

On the other side of the country, the community of Langa is counting the cost of a devastating fire, which destroyed about 300 homes and displaced around 1,000 people.

We are working with the City of Cape Town to provide shelter and relief to the affected families.

Tonight, we are a nation united in our grief.

We are a nation united in our determination to assist those who have lost their homes and possessions, and who are in desperate need of food, water and shelter.

The rains of the last week have caused extensive damage to houses, businesses, roads, bridges and water, electricity, rail and telecommunications infrastructure.

The flooding has disrupted fuel and food supplies.

Areas located close to rivers and waterways – particularly informal settlements – were severely affected and many dwellings were swept away.

Nearly 4,000 homes have been completely destroyed and over 8,300 homes have been partially damaged.

It is estimated that more than 40,000 people have been displaced by these floods.

This is a humanitarian disaster that calls for a massive and urgent relief effort.

The lives, health and well-being of thousands of people are still at risk.

The floods have caused great economic and social damage.

The Port of Durban – which is one of the largest and busiest shipping terminals on the continent and which is vital to our country's economy – has been severely affected.

Access to the port has been disrupted by extensive damaged to the Bayhead Road, which links to the Durban Port Operations to the rest of the country.

This route handles 13,000 heavy vehicles per day.

The damage caused to businesses in the area have not been fully quantified, but assessments so far suggest that the Ethekewini Metro accounts for nearly half of all the reported damage.

There has also been extensive damage to public infrastructure, including schools, health facilities, police stations and magistrates' courts.

It is estimated that over 270,000 learners have been affected.

Over 600 schools have been damaged.

Sixteen of these schools cannot be accessed due to damage to connecting roads and bridges.

We are saddened by the reports that a number of learners and at least one educator have died.

Sixty-six public health care facilities have been affected, although there has been minimal disruption to health services in most affected districts.

Extensive work is underway to restore basic services – such as water, electricity, sanitation and waste removal – to various areas in the province.

These efforts are being hampered by to damage to main supply systems and the inaccessibility of some areas.

To ensure an effective response to these tragic events, the National Disaster Management Centre last week classified the flooding as a provincial disaster.

This was followed by the declaration of the Premier of KwaZulu-Natal to invoke extraordinary measures to deal with the situation.

However, given the extent and impact of the floods, the designation of a provincial state of disaster is inadequate to deal with the scale of the emergency and the required reconstruction and rehabilitation measures and responses.

The significance of the Port of Durban and related infrastructure for the effective operation of the country's economy means that this disaster has implications far beyond the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

With the heavy rains and flooding in the Eastern Cape and indications from the South African Weather Service that the North West and Free State may also be affected by bad weather, it is clear that there are other areas of the country that need emergency intervention.

Cabinet therefore met in a special session last night and decided to declare a national state of disaster.

The Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs will gazette the declaration.

This is to ensure an effective response across all spheres of government to the extreme weather events that have occurred in several parts of the country.

The primary responsibility to coordinate and manage the disaster is assigned to the national sphere of government, working closely together with provincial governments and municipalities.

It enables the mobilisation of more resources, capabilities and technical expertise in providing relief, recovery and rehabilitation to affected communities.

We will be responding to this disaster in three phases:

First, we will focus on immediate humanitarian relief, ensuring that all affected persons are safe and that their basic needs are met.

Second, we will focus on stabilisation and recovery, rehousing people who have lost homes and restoring provision of services.

Third, we will focus on reconstruction and rebuilding.

This will not only involve the construction and repair of major infrastructure.

It will also involve the construction of houses in suitably-located areas and measures to protect the residents of these areas from such adverse weather events in the future.

Several national government departments have already been working with their provincial and local counterparts to ensure an effective response in the allocation of financial resources and technical expertise to the emergency.

The South African Police Service and the South African National Defence Force have been leading search and rescue efforts, with a total of 247 rescue operations to date.

This includes the deployment of SAPS personnel, diving teams, canine units and various vessels, helicopters and fixed-wing planes to the most affected areas.

Aircraft from the SANDF have been used both for rescue and for the delivery of relief supplies – such as food, water, tents and blankets – to people in inaccessible areas.

I have authorised the SANDF to bring in more personnel, water storage and purification supplies and engineering teams to assist with electricity and water restoration.

Various government departments at national and provincial level, municipalities, non-governmental organisations and businesses are distributing basic relief materials such as food, blankets, mattresses, clothing, chronic medication, toiletries and cooking utensils.

I wish to applaud and thank the many individuals and organisations that have taken the initiative to provide humanitarian assistance to those most affected.

This work is vital and we must all do everything within our means to assist.

I have met with the leadership of the Solidarity Fund to ask that it makes its capacity available to confront this dire emergency.

The Board has agreed to assist with humanitarian and other forms of relief in partnership with government, the private sector and various other non-governmental and community-based organisations.

The National Treasury will make an initial amount of funds available as part of our efforts with the Solidarity Fund to implement these support measures.

The Solidarity Fund has effectively managed the resources that government, the private sector and many South Africans made available to manage the COVID-19 effort as well as the July 2021 unrest assistance measures.

The Fund will now set up a separate bank account for the Flood Disaster.

This account can be used by South African and foreign donors who want to contribute to relief efforts.

The bank account details will be available during the course of tomorrow on the website of the Solidarity Fund.

One of the most pressing challenges in the affected areas is to ensure the supply of clean water and shelter.

The Department of Water and Sanitation is leading efforts to restore water supply to areas of Ethekeini that have been badly affected by damage to infrastructure.

This includes repairs to the aqueducts supplying water from the Nagle Dam to Durban Heights, assessing and repairing damage to water treatment works, and identifying and repairing leaks.

Areas without water are being supplied by water tankers, with the municipal fleet being complemented by an additional 100 tankers.

Most areas that experienced electricity disruptions, particularly in Ethekeini, are now back to full service.

The Department of Human Settlements has begun an assessment of damages to houses across the province, and has determined initial requirements for the provision of temporary accommodation, repairs to damaged houses and the replacement of destroyed houses.

An immediate task is to house those people who have been displaced by the floods.

Preparations are underway to provide temporary residential units and it is expected that construction of these should begin by the end of this week.

Financial assistance through a voucher system is being made available to assist households to rebuild partially damaged houses.

A national team of project managers and engineers have been deployed in the province to assess the damage and to advise on the rebuilding.

The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure is identifying suitable state land that can be used for resettlement.

Infrastructure South Africa is working with relevant departments in all spheres to provide technical support for the repair and rebuilding of infrastructure such as roads, bridges and schools that have been damaged.

The South African National Roads Agency is the lead agency on the extensive work required to repair roads in the province, starting with an immediate focus on the N2 and N3 highways.

Detailed work is underway to assess and quantify the damage to roads and bridges.

To date, around 1,300 road repair projects have been identified by the agencies involved.

Progress has been made in restoring operations at the Port of Durban, opening alternative routes for trucks to access the port terminals and clean up debris in the harbour.

The Department of Small Business Development is mobilising funds to assist small businesses that have been affected by the floods.

Fellow South Africans,

It is going to take a massive effort, drawing on the resources and capabilities of the entire nation, to recover from this disaster.

We will make financial resources available to meet this challenge.

The Minister of Finance has said that a R1 billion is immediately available, and will be approaching Parliament for the appropriation of additional resources.

I will be approaching the Presiding Officers to request a Joint Sitting of Parliament next week to ensure that the elected representatives of the people of our country can be directly involved in oversight of the work that is needed to provide relief and to rebuild.

A comprehensive assessment of the economic cost of these floods still has to be made, but it is clear that it will run into billions of rands for the rebuilding of infrastructure and loss of production.

It will be critical, as we undertake this work, that all the resources we mobilise are used for their intended purposes and reach the intended recipients.

There can be no room for corruption, mismanagement or fraud of any sort.

Learning from the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are drawing together various stakeholders to be part of an oversight structure to ensure all funds disbursed to respond to this disaster are properly accounted for and that the state receives value for money.

These stakeholders include the Office of the Auditor-General, business, religious sector, labour, community-based organisations as well as professional bodies such as engineers and accountants.

We are determined that there must be transparency and accountability as the projects are costed and implemented, as well as how resources are deployed from the beginning.

We are grateful for the messages of support and pledges of solidarity that have been received from across the world, including from the African Union, United Nations and several Heads of State.

These floods are a tragic reminder of the increasing frequency of extreme weather conditions as a result of climate change.

We need to increase our investment in climate adaptation measures to better safeguard communities against the effects of climate change.

At the same time, we need to pursue our own emission reduction targets through a just transition that protects vulnerable communities and safeguards jobs.

Once again, the people of South Africa are coming together to provide assistance and comfort at a time of great need.

In the past week, so much has been done by so many people to bring relief to those most affected.

I wish to commend and thank the emergency service personnel, health care workers, police and defence personnel, municipal workers, volunteers and community members who spent many hours, at great risk to themselves, saving lives and providing support.

We were deeply saddened to learn about the death over the weekend of a police diver, Sergeant Busisiswe Mjwara, who died while conducting a search for victims in the Msunduzi River.

We extend our deepest sympathies and condolences to her family, friends and colleagues.

We welcome the support that other provinces have provided in the form of technical expertise and other disaster assistance to KwaZulu-Natal.

We thank the religious community for their prayers and words of comfort over the Easter weekend.

There is still so much more that needs to be done to restore homes, lives and livelihoods.

Let us all work together, as a united and determined nation, to recover and rebuild from this tragic disaster.

May God bless South Africa and protect its people.

I thank you.