

STATEMENT: NADMO "THE LAME HORSE"

BY HON. ERNEST HENRY NORGBEY MP FOR ASHAIMAN CONSTITUENCY

Background

Mr Speaker, it is said that disasters are divine interventions in disguise hence, the series of droughts, famine and bushfires that hit Ghana in the 1980s was characterised by interventions to manage disasters and emergencies. One such intervention was the National Mobilisation Programme. Key among their achievements was organising over 200,000 volunteers who planted millions of cocoa trees, rehabilitated several thousand acres of burnt cocoa farms, controlled bushfires, improved village wells as well as sanitation. In 1983, under the same programme, 1.2 million Ghanaian expatriates from Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire were successfully evacuated and helped to settle.

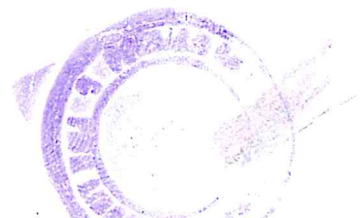
Mr Speaker, in the 1990s, there was a global campaign powered by the UN, dubbed "International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction." It was against this backdrop that NADMO was formed in 1996, backed by an act of parliament, 517.

Mr Speaker, considering the achievements of the National Mobilisation Programme and the primary functions of NADMO, continuity was imminent. However, a quick study of the functions of NADMO reveals that, to a large extent, the organisation has been limited to one function; rehabilitation services for victims of disasters particularly, distribution of relief items.

Current State

Mr Speaker, fast forward to 2017, the challenges the organisation has encountered in living up to its core mandate has raised doubts about its preparedness towards the management of disasters. Mr Speaker, consider the mother of all disasters that happened on June 3, 2015. The disaster is almost two years, yet, it will forever be talked about, not because we enjoy talking, rather the nation was hard hit by the magnitude of that disaster.

Ghana lost about 200 people; several individuals who survived the flood-fire disaster lost their homes and properties. Widows, widowers, and orphans were on the rise, the entire nation was engulfed in grief. We cannot even ascertain the exact figure because days after the disaster, dead bodies, some burnt beyond recognition were found in drains and sewers. It was such a horrific incident.



Mr Speaker, this was a chance for NADMO to shine but that did not happen due to ill preparation towards response to disasters. Here is how the Centre for Health System and Policy Research describes the incident, “at the scene, there were reports of confusion, inadequate information flow and dispute of who was in charge and which regulatory body had failed to function effectively, therefore enabling to the crisis.”

Mr. Speaker, NADMO lost credibility and trust as far as the media and the public were concerned. They promised relief items which when delivered, were woefully inadequate to cater for the needs of the victims. Thankfully, there were other agencies, media houses as well as individuals who came up with donations in cash and in kind to support the victims. Our very own Hon Zanetor Rawlings, in partnership with TV3 led a campaign to raise funds for the victims. The fund is still paying for the fees of some of the victims.

Mr. Speaker, a research work authored by Seth Kpodovia emerged weeks after the disaster. The contents clearly imply that our institutions are not functioning effectively and NADMO as an organisation failed in coordinating and collaborating with government agencies in managing disasters. It explained events that would possibly lead to the destruction of the Nima Sand Trap sited at the Kwame Nkrumah Circle near the GCB building and stated, “With the destruction of the Nima Sand Trap, Accra is in trouble. The debris cannot be trapped and distilled”.

Mr Speaker, he predicted accurately the disaster that occurred on June 3rd, 2015 and it came to pass.

NADMO Act 927

Mr Speaker, as a discerning nation we have drawn lessons from other related disasters such as the May 9 disaster which was poorly managed; the Melcom disaster which saw the importation of sniffer dogs from Israel to rescue victims; the annual spillage of the Bagre Dam which years on end cause floods and from the June 3 flood-fire disaster. Committees were set up, investigations were conducted, laudable suggestions and recommendations were drafted including elevating the organisation to a Service just like GES or the Ghana Police Service in order to attract foreign donors.

Mr Speaker, on July 28th 2016, a bill was passed by this house, went through presidential approval and now NADMO is running on the new Act, 927. The Act, among other things, grants the organisation 3% share of the District

Assemblies Common Fund to be paid into the Disaster Fund. The new Act also grants the organisation some powers that will help in its functions.

Mr. Speaker, the rains, its associated floods and accompanied risks are here again; however the new Act is yet to be fully implemented. Our institutions that have been charged to provide Disaster Management Emergency Response, particularly NADMO, will once again mix and miss the point and come up with all manner of excuses because the organisation has not seen the full implementation of the new Act.

Challenges

Mr Speaker, NADMO has a solid structure which when adequately resourced can support not only victims of disaster but also complement the nation's efforts in fighting the galamsey menace, reconstruction of our lands and water bodies as well as create employment for the teeming unemployed youth of this country.

Mr Speaker, paramount among the challenges is the political tag placed on the organisation. The organisation is perceived as a collection of political party activists or "job for the boys".

Mr Speaker, sadly, that is the reality. The hard truth on the other hand is that, Ghana cannot thrive without politics and politics cannot thrive without foot soldiers. One way or the other every citizen must be provided for. However, let us exercise decorum as far NADMO is concerned because the safeties of human lives and properties worth billions are at stake.

Mr Speaker, NADMO should be armed with the expertise to do more than just distribute relief items in the event of a disaster.

Mr Speaker, another major challenge faced by NADMO is the allocation of adequate budget to the organisation. The budgetary allocation of the organisation is always slashed such that by the time it travels from the offices of the national, regional through to the district and to the zonal levels, the allocation cannot be used to run any projected activity.

Mr Speaker, a lot of district and zonal staff have no offices to operate from. Currently NADMO owes suppliers over thirty-five million Ghana Cedis, inadequate logistics for effective and timely response to disasters, unpaid salary arrears, the challenges are overwhelming.

Mr Speaker, according to Eugene Davis of the Business and Financial Times, the passage of the Act will fail “.....if the perennial delay in releasing the District Assemblies Common Fund is not addressed”

Mr Speaker, yesterday, we said tomorrow. Here we are today; the bill is yet to be fully implemented.

Mr Speaker, another challenge of equal measure and for which the new Act did not make provision for is the salaries of NADMO staff who are the lowest paid personnel among the Security Services. Management of disaster involves a lot of risk; however, there is no provision of risk allowance for staff of the Organisation. As a result of this, staff that are trained by the organisation are poached by other high paying organisations and there is low morale among staff of the organisation.

Recommendations

Mr. Speaker, the only way to turn around the situation is to focus on long term goals since the short term approach has been the cause of recurrent preventive catastrophes.

Mr. Speaker, going forward, I believe we are all charged and still mobilising for Ghana’s future while celebrating 60 years of independence. This new Act of NADMO needs full implementation in order for the various departments to function effectively.

Mr. Speaker, responding to and managing disasters require a multi-sectoral as well as an intra-sectoral approach. NADMO requires a vibrant workforce under an efficient leader who will spearhead activities to bring all concerned sectors on board to ensure adequate prediction, regulation and prevention in order to mitigate, monitor, inform and educate the general public about disasters.

Mr Speaker, NADMO does not operate ambulatory services, they have no trained paramedics to offer first aid and to ascertain deaths while rescuing victims of disasters, as well as fire tenders in the event of a fire disaster.

Mr Speaker, in the interest of the nation and the welfare of citizens, let us shake off the politics in NADMO, appoint persons who will rebrand and reorganise the organisation and help government implement laudable projects such as “planting for food and jobs” campaign. NADMO can collaborate to

create a lot of jobs for Ghanaians as it happened under the National Mobilisation Programme.

Conclusion

Mr Speaker, we need to come to terms with the fact that Accra and Ghana as a whole is not safe with the onset of the rainy season. As a result of this, many workers will stay home rather than risk their lives in a bid to get to work to serve mother Ghana. If the new Act is fully implemented, NADMO will be empowered financially; resourced with appropriate equipments; with an efficient work force and hopefully, they will live up to their motto which is "Prevention Pays".

