STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT ON THE PERENNIAL FLOODING IN KLOTTEY KORLE CONSTITUENCY AND ITS ENVIRONS BY HONOURABLE DR ZANETOR AGYEMAN-RAWLINGS, MP FOR KLOTTEY KORLE - 7 MARCH, 2017

Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to make a Statement on an issue that I am very passionate about, which is the environment. Mr Speaker, it was with a sense of reassurance when I read the Third Report on the Appointments Committee on the vetting of the Minister for Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation as well as Works and Housing. Their statements highlighted most of the issues related to the etiology of our woes during the rainy season in Accra.

Mr Speaker, much as I applaud their commitment, I am concerned about the timelines for implementation, given the fact that we have already experienced one major rainstorm this year. With the onset of the early rains comes panic, a sense of helplessness and insecurity due to internal displacement, loss of lives and property and disease outbreaks within our communities. We cannot prevent the storms, but we can certainly expedite measures to mitigate the effects of rainfall on our quality of life. The general trend is, most drains following each rain storm are overflowing with plastics and other non-biodegradable waste.

Some of the reasons for the flooding include; poor disposal of refuse and choked drains; the loss of attenuation reservoirs, between Aburi and Accra; flouting of the laws regarding| planning, building structures in waterways and a drainage system that no longer has the capacity to contain volume of floodwater due to rainfall. The pattern of rainfall has become very erratic due to climate change; and the subsequent flooding in Klottey Korle and other parts of the Greater Accra Region has become a perennial affair.

In fact, there were several incidents of flooding in 2015 and 2016. For example, in January 2015, there were two heavy downpours that resulted in severe flooding in the Klottey Korle Constituency and other constituencies in low lying areas surrounding the Odaw River with water levels rising up to seven feet in some areas. Indeed, Mr Speaker, most of these did not catch the public’s eye until the unfortunate twin disaster (flood and fire) of 3rd June, 2015, which has been etched in our memories. During the last rains about ten days ago, a woman carrying a baby on her back drowned in Osu as she tried to make her way home. She left behind a nine-month old baby, who survived against the odds after going into a coma.

The catastrophic event of 3rd June, 2015 resulted in the deaths of around 150 people, the displacement of thousands and loss of millions of cedis in property. That incident saw an intersectoral collaboration between National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO), the Police and Fire Service and other agencies under the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministries involved were Defence, Health, Local Government and Rural Development, Energy, et cetera. There exists a Technical Report on the floods in Ghana following this event (Ghana-Floods Situation Report: UNCT Ghana June 08, 2015).
On the 3rd of June 2016, a Statement by the Hon Member of Parliament for Okaikoi Central was read on the floor of this House in commemoration of the June 3, 2015 disaster. (Ref. Parliamentary Debates Friday, 3rd June, 2016. Fourth Series, Vol 94, No. 11). There were several comments made by current and former Hon Members of Parliament including our current leadership on both sides.

As Klottey Korle falls under the Accra Metropolitan Area, we are anxiously awaiting the appointment of a Mayor for Accra, so that we can work closely to ensure a clean, disciplined and orderly capital city with some communities. Following the June 3 disaster, it became evident that one of the most important contributory factors to the recurrent flooding in Accra is our attitude to waste disposal.

In one of the communities in my constituency, we engaged the members in sensitisation on sanitation, provision of refuse bins, citizens policing each other on the no-littering rule, timely collection of rubbish and community clean-ups. This resulted in an improvement in general environmental cleanliness and decreased flooding over a period of six months.

Mr Speaker, respectfully, if we focus solely on infrastructure without a serious focus on the human element, we are unlikely to succeed in our bid to reduce the perennial flooding. Behavioural modification and sensitisation of people to the adverse effect of environmental pollution and degradation is fundamental.

Within the mandate of NADMO as stated in their National Disaster Management Plan, is a strategic objective to advocacy on protection and health. I am of the view that, perhaps, we need to break these down into smaller flags that are simple, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound. Our regulatory bodies and MMDAs should work closely to ensure that permits are issued in accordance with established rules and regulations and tougher penalties imposed on offenders. I humbly suggest the enforcement of bylaws regarding sanitation by the relevant authorities.

Green areas in our cities, such as the Efua Sutherland Park and the Achimota Forest must be preserved at all costs to decrease the surface water run-off, which also contributes significantly to the flooding. The Department of Parks and Gardens must be adequately resourced to maintain the remaining parks and plant more trees in collaboration with the various communities. School children should be encouraged to take part in such activities in order to imbibe in them the care for their environment.

Recycling and upcycling should be enforced. Our sister nations like Congo and Rwanda took a strong stance and have banned plastics with very positive results. The collection of refuse by companies must be timely and the further processing of waste must be properly monitored. We should aim to recycle more and decrease the number of landfills in existence.
As a matter of urgency, those of us in Parliament, with the help of the Media, should advocate for behavioural change towards the environment and sanitation in line with localising the Sustainable Development Goals 3 (good health and wellbeing) and 6 (clean water and sanitation).

The safety and security of any community or country, is not simply the absence of war; it also includes socioeconomic, environmental and health factors. With emphasis on security and development, I would like to quote Robert S McNamara in his writing on Security in the Contemporary World,

“Security is development, without development, there can be no security. A developing nation that does not in fact develop simply cannot remain ‘secure.’ It cannot remain secure for the intractable reason that its own citizenry cannot shed its human nature.”

Given the different components that contribute to the exacerbation of the effects of the rains, may I humbly suggest that the Rt. Hon Speaker directs an intersectoral meeting as a matter of urgency for the committees on Environment, Science and Technology, Interior (including NADMO), Works and Housing, Local Government and Rural Development to have a joint sitting in order to apprise themselves of our preparedness for such crises and to ascertain what pre-emptive measures have been instituted to mitigate the impact of the rains on the safety and security of our city and its inhabitants.

Mr Speaker, I will conclude with a passionate call to all citizenry of our dear nation to play an active role in the upkeep of our communities as we are all connected to each other and the environment.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.