



MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

By

THE HON. MICHAEL H. DUNKLEY JP MP
PREMIER & MINISTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY

IN THE WAKE OF FAY AND GONZALO

21ST NOVEMBER 2014

“Hell is empty and all the devils are here.”

William Shakespeare, *the Tempest*

Mr. Speaker, I begin this statement with a quote from Shakespeare’s *Tempest* which perhaps accurately captures the feelings of all of us as we braved the sustained force of Hurricane Gonzalo.

As I indicated in written responses to questions from the Honourable Member opposite, the Executive of the Emergency Measures Organization (EMO) met on Monday, 17th November to debrief the preparation for and response to the hurricane. I am pleased to advise this Honourable House that the meeting

confirmed that Bermuda's emergency response protocols are robust and when tested, demonstrate resilience.

Mr. Speaker based on previous experiences the pre-positioning of assets and personnel at various points proved invaluable to the recovery of some critical elements of our infrastructure. This was particularly seen as follows:

- The early embodiment of key elements of the Bermuda Regiment with a KEMH ambulance positioned at Warwick Camp
- The pre-positioning of an Immediate Response Team (IRT) from the Bermuda Regiment, co-located with the Bermuda Fire & Rescue Service in the east end and the early engagement of private contractors to attend to the airport clean up anticipated
- The enhanced staffing of the Lamb / Foggo Urgent Care Centre by the Bermuda Hospitals Board as well as BFRS appliance at KEMH
- The introduction of longer shift patterns by the Bermuda Police Service
- The establishment of the shelter at CedarBridge Academy

These and other preemptive actions were critical to the eventual recovery effort. **Mr. Speaker**, one important safeguard that now forms part of the EMO's standing operating

procedure is as part of the pre-positioning and preparations, there is an agreed emergency maritime medical evacuation plan in the event of closure to the causeway that can be dispatched as soon as hurricane force winds have abated. This ensures that any casualties can be moved as soon as it safe to do so to the main island for any specialist care required.

Mr. Speaker, the track of the hurricane and the damage sustained are now part of an extensive public record. As a community we must continue to be grateful that no loss of life was occasioned by the most severe storm to affect the Island in a decade.

Mr. Speaker, the preparation for the hurricane from the EMO perspective was handled well and all agencies were fully ready for the work that would be necessary in the aftermath:

At this point, **Mr. Speaker,** let me address the activity that preceded Tropical Storm Fay which was the system that impacted Bermuda only days before Gonzalo. Although Fay did not become a hurricane, the conditions and damage it inflicted were simply not expected by the wider community. There are some critical points to note on this system:

1. By Thursday October 10th, the Bermuda Weather Service caused the National Hurricane Centre to issue a forecast that gave the low pressure system in the area a 20% chance of formation within 5 days.
2. This information was conveyed to the public by the usual methods but perhaps owing to this low probability no real emphasis was placed on preparation for any impact or tropical storm conditions.
3. At 430pm on Saturday, 12th October, a hurricane watch was issued which of course immediately suggests that the approaching weather event is serious and should be prepared for in those terms.
4. Fay also shifted its track 50 nautical miles to the west from its previous forecast which meant more time in the formation of an organized eye but delayed forecasted onset of the stronger winds.
5. The peak winds of Fay were felt between 7 and 8 am on Sunday, 13th October.

Mr. Speaker, I must reinforce a point made both locally and overseas. Tropical systems are by their very nature unpredictable and often quickly change in both intensity and track. The Bermuda Weather Service updates tropical system bulletins every three hours for this very reason and one of the key “lessons learned” from this hurricane season is for us to encourage the public to monitor tropical bulletins more closely.

Additionally, **Mr. Speaker**, we found that our media cycle simply does not lend itself to wide dissemination of information when an alert of this kind is issued late in the day on a weekend. One of the key issues for the EMO to address is an alert system that will achieve the necessary level of awareness irrespective of the time at which it is required to be communicated. This will also involve a technical exercise which must ensure that the broadcasting strength of the emergency station FM 100.1 is improved. The station was expertly manned throughout the relevant period and provided an excellent source of information and reassurance to the community.

Mr. Speaker, the entire community has been rightly fulsome in its praise of the emergency services, the men and women of Belco as well as those men and women within the Ministry of Public Works who essentially put this country back together again. I cannot emphasize enough how grateful we are to all of those who played a role in the restoration effort.

As the Throne Speech indicated, the Government intends to support the secondment of a senior police officer to the Ministry of National Security who will act as disaster planner, secretary to the Emergency Measures Organization and develop a strategy for the management of large scale public

events. This role will enhance the Island's preparedness for natural disasters and honours one of the recommendations of the National Security & Defence Review.

Mr. Speaker, as the Chairman of the EMO I can advise this Honourable House that I was impressed by the preparations of all of the various agencies on whom we regularly depend. There were long days and nights of work and at no stage were there complaints about conditions and members remained professional providing their best advice and effort at all times. Bermuda can be confident that we have in place strong systems in the event of natural disasters and competent personnel charged with administering them. Bermuda weathered this storm well and our speedy return to normalcy is a testament to our strength as a community.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.