

From Celebration To Tragedy: How Accident Claimed Six During Disability Day Celebration In Kogi



By **Ademu Idakwo** 2 Days Ago in Feature



Share on WhatsApp

Share on Facebook



Share on X

Telegram

What began as a day of hope and empowerment for persons with disabilities in Kogi State ended in heartbreaking tragedy when six participants, men and women who left home with gratitude and expectation lost their lives in a violent crash along the Lokoja–Okene highway while returning from a Disability Day celebration organised by First Lady Hajia Sefinat Usman Ododo. ADEMU IDAKWO

writes that the event meant to offer recognition and support instead plunged the disability community into one of its darkest moments in recent years.

What began as a joyful outing for persons living with disabilities ended in unspeakable heartbreak when a bus conveying participants from the celebration crashed along the notorious Zariagi axis of the Lokoja–Okene highway. In an instant, the day’s hope was shattered: six passengers died on the spot, while thirteen others were left badly injured and rushed to hospitals in Lokoja and Okene. What was meant to be a day of recognition and dignity instead descended into a tragedy that has left families and the entire disability community reeling in pain.

Earlier that day, the First Lady’s Disability Day celebration in Lokoja had been filled with warmth, encouragement, and a rare sense of visibility for a community so often pushed to the margins. Known for her quiet compassion, Hajia Sefinat Usman Ododo has in recent months broadened support for vulnerable groups through empowerment initiatives, welfare outreach, and mobility assistance. For many who attended, the event felt like one of the few moments they were genuinely seen, included, and valued, a day that briefly lifted the weight of lifelong exclusion.

But the road home had other plans.

Eyewitnesses told LEADERSHIP Weekend that the moment of impact was abrupt and terrifying , “like a force falling from the sky,” one recalled. In the chaos that followed, survivors were pulled from the wreckage and rushed to nearby hospitals, even as news of the tragedy spread rapidly across the state, leaving shock and sorrow in its wake.

Across communities, grief tightened its grip.

In Okene, Rabi Kadiri , a neighbour of one of the victims could barely find her voice as she recalled how her friend had left home that morning, proud and excited to be invited to the event.

“She felt honoured to go, we never imagined this would be the end. “Rabi said, her words breaking under the weight of tears.

For many residents, it is the cruel contrast that deepens the pain: celebration at dawn, sorrow by dusk.

Earlier at the event, the atmosphere had been vibrant. The first Lady spoke of

dignity, inclusion, and the need to create opportunities for persons living with disabilities. Participants mingled freely, posed for photographs, shared meals, and expressed gratitude for recognition long denied in everyday society. Event organisers were shaken by how a day built on hope ended with unimaginable loss.

No Desks, No Chairs: Delta Students Sit On Bare Floor In Classrooms

Simon Atadoga: Redefining Modern Audit And Financial Integrity Through Tech And Innovation

X-Raying Gov Lawal's Resolve To Make Zamfara Stronger

Inside Kano's Game-changing Fight Against Hard Drugs

Speaking to LEADERSHIP Weekend, the First Lady's senior special assistant on media, Muhammed Ohikwo, described the accident as deeply distressing for the First Family. He confirmed that the state government had taken responsibility for the medical bills of all survivors and would provide support to the families of the deceased. Ohikwo added that the Disability Day programme, introduced last year under the national Renewed Hope Agenda of Nigeria's First Lady, Senator Remi Tinubu, would continue annually despite the tragedy.

A statement by the commissioner for Information, Kingsley Fanwo, also confirmed the fatalities, describing the day as "dark and painful." He extended the government's heartfelt condolences to the families of the deceased and called for prayers for the swift recovery of those still receiving medical care.

Governor Ahmed Usman Ododo visited the survivors in hospital and later held private meetings with grieving families. He described the victims as "hopeful citizens whose lives were cut short after a day meant to uplift their spirits" and vowed that the government would continue providing support to the affected families.

Beyond the grief, the tragedy has reignited long-standing concerns about the Lokoja–Okene highway, a route that residents say has claimed far too many lives over the years

Chairman of the Kogi NGOs Network (KONGONET), Hamza Aliyu, in an exclusive interview with LEADERSHIP Weekend, lamented the alarming number of deaths recorded on the road. He commended the federal government for revoking the long-delayed reconstruction contract but insisted that an immediate re-award was critical.

“The road has taken too many lives,” he said. “Re-awarding the contract quickly is the only way to reduce this tragedy.”

Aliyu also urged the state government to decentralise major programmes requiring long-distance travel to Lokoja, especially for vulnerable groups.

In Zango Daji, another relative of one of the deceased, Onono Ozovehe, described the loss as painful but cautioned against blaming the first Lady.

“She meant well,” he said. “We only beg the government to fix the road so others don’t die like our sister.”

Also speaking, the chairman of persons with disabilities (PWD) in the state, Arome Daniel, said he appreciated the governor’s prompt response to the incident.

“For the governor to have personally visited our members who were injured during the crash, and also sent emissaries to the bereaved, it shows how he values our community,” he stated.

The PWD chairman further disclosed that the present administration has been paying attention to the needs of persons with disabilities through the establishment of the People with Disabilities Commission, which has been gathering data and working for their welfare for the past two years.

Meanwhile, in response to heightened concerns over road safety, the Kogi state government recently approved major upgrades for the Kogi state traffic management agency (KOTRAMA). These include new ICT equipment, a tow truck, patrol vehicles, a power bike, uniforms, and other operational tools. Funds have also been approved for the recruitment and training of Road Marshals and Emergency Response Teams.

KOTRAMA managing director, Abdulrazaq Aminu, said the new measures reflect Governor Ododo’s renewed commitment to safer and more efficient road management.

Today, Kogi state mourns. Families replay their last conversations, holding tightly to the excitement their loved ones carried as they set out for the celebration. Yet even in the shadow of grief, the spirit of hope that inspired the event lingers, a reminder that inclusion and recognition for vulnerable citizens must remain at the heart of governance, even when moments of joy are overtaken by unimaginable tragedy.