

Lagos fire: Trapped China-returnee, two others recovered dead

December 28, 2025 12:00 am



Fire-ravaged Great Nigeria Insurance House on Martins Street, Lagos Island. Credit: Lagos State Fire and Rescue Service | X

By Dayo Oyewo

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A China-based clothier, identified simply as Obum, has been recovered dead alongside a male and a female adult from the rubble of the Great Nigeria Insurance House plaza, which was gutted by fire in the Balogun Market area of Lagos Island, Lagos State.

The fire started on the fourth floor on Wednesday and spread to the sixth floor of the 25-storey building before engulfing the remaining floors and adjoining structures.

A detached section of the plaza, however, collapsed during the inferno, thereby trapping some traders and market assistants.

The Lagos State Emergency Management Agency, in a statement by its spokesperson, Nosa Okunbor, confirmed the development on Saturday.

According to him, the adult female, extricated dead from within the collapsed structure, was handed over to her husband.

He added that one decapitated adult male was extricated with severed limbs, while the other adult male was extricated with the body intact.

“An adult female was extricated dead from within the collapsed structure and handed over to her husband. One decapitated adult male extricated with severed limbs. One adult male was extricated with body intact.

“A total number of rescued victims as at the time of writing this report are eight males rescued with various degrees of injuries and transported to the hospital (including a fireman). 5 “Walking Wounded” which comprises 3 males and 2 females who suffered minor injuries, were administered first aid treatments and were subsequently released at the incident scene,” the statement partly read.

A source in the agency had earlier told our correspondent that the two adult males were recovered on Friday, one at about 11:03am and the second at about 12:03pm.

Meanwhile, a trader, Zacheaus Afolayan, confirmed to our correspondent that one of the male adults was discovered to be that of Obum.

“When his body was released to us later in the day, we discovered that it was Obum. His body was intact, and the family had taken it to their village in Anambra for burial,” Afolayan disclosed.

During a visit to the scene of the incident on Thursday, Afolayan said Obum was evacuating his goods when the structure fell on him.

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He said, “Obum’s store is behind the plaza. He had already evacuated almost all his goods when the fire was spreading, and went back to carry the last ones. That was when the detached part of the plaza, which had been weakened by the fire, collapsed on his store.”

Afolayan added that Obum contacted him from beneath the rubble in the early hours of Thursday, confirming that he was still alive.

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“He called me around 2am from under the rubble, and that was when we knew he was still alive. He said he was not the only one trapped there. He was begging us not to allow him die, saying no one would take care of his children. He is based in China and only comes home during festive periods to do business,” he said.

Afolayan, who also owns a shop in the market, said Obum called again on Thursday afternoon but sounded weaker.

Meanwhile, families of other victims trapped under the rubble have called for more support for the emergency responders working at the scene.

One of the victims’ relatives, Fatima Ibitoye, lamented that the rescue operation had slowed down due to a lack of manpower.

According to her, two of his brothers were still trapped under the rubble.

“My two brothers are still in the rubble. It has been four days now, and they have not brought them out. The manpower here is shot, and that is why the LASEMA officials are not effective enough. They only have one caterpillar working, and it often breaks down while they are working.”

Another relative who identified himself simply as Kayode said the fire was still burning in some parts of the building, adding that the firemen were no longer supplying water to suppress the heat from the rubbles.

“The back of the building, which is Fred Macween Street opposite Oluwole market, is the focus of the emergency now. That where people are trapped, but the firemen are not supplying water there. The heat from the rubble is affecting the LASEMA officials. They said they can’t move close to the spot because of the heat. The firemen only brought water once, and we have not seen them since then. Our people are still trapped under the rubble. We need help.”

The spokesperson for the Lagos State Fire and Rescue Services, Shakiru Amodu, said firemen were still at the scene of the incident.

He said, “We are doing our best, though it may not be enough. I was still there myself today, and after I left, another fire engine went past me. What we have now is no longer trapped persons but casualties because it has been about four days already. That is why we are still there, and we will still be there till ground zero. We will also be the ones to leave there last.”