

GNI fire: Three siblings burnt to death for burial Jan 14

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One of the brothers Photo: Facebook

| By Dayo Oyewo

The three Omatu brothers who died in the inferno that gutted the 25-storey Great Nigeria Insurance House on Lagos Island, Lagos State, will be buried on January 14.

PUNCH Metro reported that the fire started on the fourth floor and spread to the sixth floor of the plaza before engulfing the remaining floors and adjoining structures.

A detached section of the plaza, estimated to be about seven floors high, collapsed during the inferno, trapping some traders and market assistants.

One of the families worst hit by the incident was the Omatu family, which lost three brothers identified as Steve, 40; Casmir, 39; and Collins, 37.

The siblings were said to have been trapped in the building and are believed to have died in the fire.

A surviving twin, Camillus Omatu, reportedly escaped the blaze.

Giving an update on Monday, a sister of the deceased, Mimi Nonyerem, said a service of songs would be held on January 7, while the burial would take place on January 14.

In a Facebook post, Nonyerem wrote, “The burial date for our brothers has been scheduled for January 14, 2026. I humbly request your prayers for divine protection over my family. If you are in Ihiala, Anambra State, your presence would be greatly appreciated.”

According to the obituary she shared, the service of songs will be held in Lagos State, while the burial ceremony will take place in Anambra State.

On January 3, Nonyerem had marked the posthumous birthday of one of the deceased brothers, Steve.

“Happy birthday, Uncle Steve. I will wake up from this dream,” she wrote.

Another relative, William Omatu, also posted, “Happy birthday, nwannem Stephen Onyeka Omatu. Congratulations on your first birthday in heaven. May the angels and saints celebrate you.”

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Meanwhile, the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency stated that preliminary investigations revealed the fire originated from an apartment on the fourth floor of the building, before spreading to the sixth floor and other areas.

Shop owners were said to have fled the scene in panic as the inferno raged, while emergency responders battled for hours and days to bring the fire under control.

As of last Monday, about 20 people were reportedly still trapped under the rubble, with relatives submitting names and photographs of their missing loved ones.

Relatives who earlier spoke to PUNCH Metro in separate interviews provided names and photographs of their affected loved ones.

The victims include Elo Chukwu, Omeigbo Chuwuebuka, Omeigbo Chukwudubem, Kayode Omoniyi, Ikechukwudi Asobi, and Murphy Aborinwa.

Others are Onyeka Obinwa, Mercy Ukamaka, and Taofeeq Opera, as well as a trader identified as Chiding and two of his boys.

PUNCH Metro further learnt that the remaining trapped persons include several other market assistants whose identities could not be ascertained.

Meanwhile, emergency responders have so far recovered eight bodies from the rubble, while recovery operations are still ongoing at the scene of the incident.

The Controller General of the Lagos State Fire and Rescue Services, in a statement on Saturday, stated that preliminary assessments indicated serious fire safety violations.

“These include overstocking of combustible materials from floor to ceiling with little or no ventilation, absence of proper fire safety infrastructure, unsafe market practices such as generator usage within buildings, shops constructed around transformers, and other hazardous activities.

“Such conditions can lead to self-generated heat build-up and spontaneous ignition, even without external triggers,” she wrote.

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