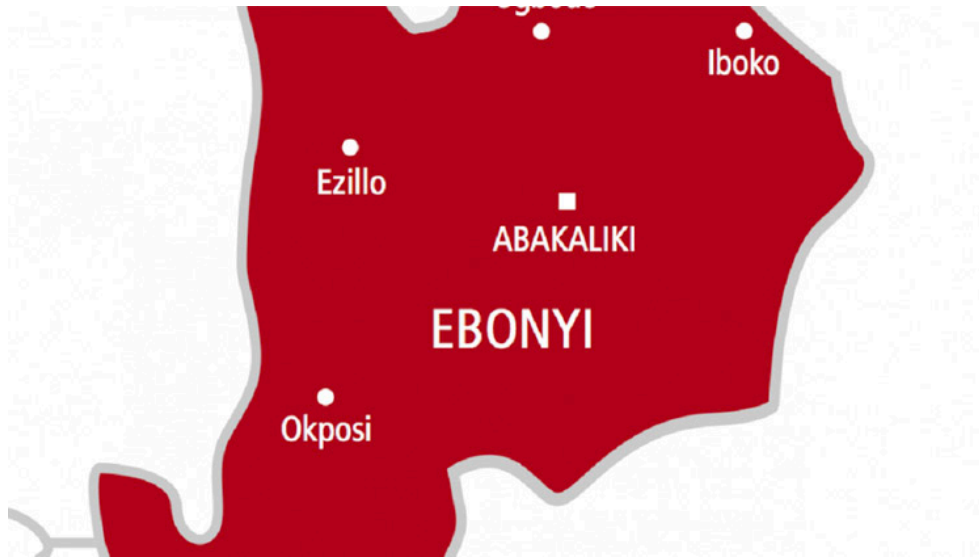


Three feared dead, others injured in Ebonyi mining pit collapse

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By Edward Nnachi

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A mining pit at Enyim Agalegu community in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State has collapsed, leaving no fewer than three persons dead and many others sustaining varying degrees of injury.

The incident, which happened on Saturday, occurred at a mining pit reportedly operated by First Patriots Limited, formerly known as Royal Salt.

Confirming the development on Sunday at the scene, the National Chairman of Enyim Agalegu Edukwu Opeke Federated Union, Oboke Chukwuma Collins, said he received a distress call at about 4 p.m. on Saturday notifying

him that the pit had caved in on miners.

According to him, he immediately rushed to the site and mobilised members of the community to assist in rescue efforts. He said they worked to remove the overburden that had trapped the victims beneath the collapsed earth.



“We evacuated some overburden on top of some lifeless people, like three of them, and we rescued about four that are injured,” he said.

Mr Collins noted that the community had previously written to the company and the state Ministry of Solid Minerals, requesting that the pit be released to the community for controlled mining after the company allegedly completed work at the main pit.

He described the activity at the site as illegal, noting that all efforts to secure approval from the company had been rebuffed.

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“We engaged them (the company) in writing, even to the Commissioner for Solid Minerals, but they said no. So we, the leadership of the community, backed off from the agitation,” he added.

Collins, who lamented the loss of lives at the site, said the recent deaths bring the total number of persons who have so far lost their lives at the site to five.

Earlier at the scene on Sunday, the Commissioner for Solid Minerals Development in the state, Hon. Chidi Onyi, described the incident as unfortunate and extended condolences to the families of the deceased.

“It is never our interest or intention to lose some of our people who are under our care,” he said.

The commissioner attributed the recurring accidents in mining communities to illegal mining activities, which, according to him, were necessitated by greed.

He reiterated that the government was not aware that the site had been abandoned.

“This site belongs to First Patriots. Both the state and federal governments are not aware that this site has been abandoned. The site is still very active,” he added.