

Family seeks justice as toddler dies inside Rivers school

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By Uthman Salami

The parents of a two-year-old girl are demanding justice after their daughter died in a tragic accident at her school in Eligbolo, Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

The toddler, identified as Winnie, was said to have died from injuries she sustained after a bookshelf fell on her while she was asleep in the classroom.

The child's father, Iasuaka Akekue, while speaking to newsmen in Port Harcourt on Wednesday evening, said the incident occurred on March 17 at Wisdom Gate International School, where his daughter had gone for the day.

He said he was informed that Winnie was asleep when the bookshelf suddenly fell on her. He added that a verbal report from the pathologist who conducted the autopsy indicated that she suffered a fractured skull.

The distraught father expressed dismay that the family was only informed about the incident after the school had taken the child to two different hospitals.

He also alleged that the school quickly cleaned up the scene and moved the bookshelf, adding that some individuals had been pressuring him and his wife to bury their child quickly and settle the matter.

According to Akekue, "A verbal report from the pathologist said there was a significant fracture to the skull that led to haemorrhage, which could be the cause of death. He also told us that within a week, the

formal report would be made available to the police.

“So we left that day believing that by the following Wednesday, we would be called to discuss the findings of the autopsy and decide on the next steps.”

He also accused the police of attempting to cover up the matter.

“The investigating police officer did not allow me to see the document she claimed to have obtained from the other hospital.

“On Thursday, I was told that the person detained had been released. While we are grieving, we find the attitude of the school very disturbing, as they have been using proxies and highly placed individuals to pressure me.

“At this point, I do not know how safe I am. All I want is justice for my daughter. I need to be able to lay her to rest knowing what actually killed her, but no thorough investigation has been carried out.

“Everything has been about suppressing the matter in the hope that we will agree to a settlement,” he said.

On her part, Winnie’s mother, Chinyere Akekue, said she was given conflicting accounts of what happened, noting that when a teacher first called her, she was made to believe that her child was still alive.

The grieving mother said the entire family, including their three children, has been devastated by the loss, adding that they have been under intense pressure to settle the matter quietly.

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“It has been three weeks without my child. She slept beside me the night before I took her to school. For three weeks, I have been expecting her to return home, but she hasn’t. She is no longer in the house.

“Her siblings are worried. They were told at school that Winnie was at home, but when they got back, she wasn’t there.

“When we finally returned home that night, they kept asking for Winnie. When I told them what happened, they all started crying,” she said.

She added, “We were surprised when calls started coming from different quarters, asking us to go and bury her quickly. I don’t even know how they got my husband’s boss’s contact. They even reached out to our church leaders.

“Nobody told us exactly what happened. It was at the hospital that we were told a shelf fell on her head. Earlier, we were told it was something else. At that point, we didn’t know what to believe anymore.”

Meanwhile, the management of Wisdom Gate International School, located along Eligbolo Road in Obio/Akpor LGA, has expressed sadness over the tragic loss of the toddler in its care.

In a statement issued on Wednesday night, the school said the child was attended to immediately and taken for urgent medical care, where she later died.

While condoling with the family, the school said it has been cooperating fully with relevant authorities to ensure a thorough and transparent investigation.

The school also acknowledged concerns raised by the public and assured that the safety and well-being of all children in its care remain a top priority.

It added that efforts are ongoing to review and strengthen safety standards, insisting that it has not withheld any information from authorities.

The statement read, “We are deeply saddened by the tragic loss of a child in our care.” Our hearts are with the family at this incredibly painful time, and we extend our sincere condolences.

“Immediately following the incident, the child was attended to without delay and taken for urgent medical care. The matter was promptly reported, and we have been fully cooperating with relevant authorities to ensure a thorough and transparent review.

“We understand the concerns this situation has raised among parents and the wider community. We wish to assure all concerned that the safety and well-being of every child entrusted to us remains our highest priority.

“We continue to uphold and reinforce our established safety standards and protocols. We remain committed to openness and accountability and are fully cooperating with the appropriate authorities. At no time have we withheld any information.

“Out of respect for the family and the ongoing process, we will refrain from further public comment. However, we remain open to lawful and constructive engagement. Our thoughts and prayers remain with the family during this difficult time,” it concluded.