

Rivers boat crash claims two siblings, operator arrested

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File photo: Rivers State Map

By Dennis Naku

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Two siblings, Mekalachi Gogochuri, 25, and his younger sister, Rejoice Gogochuri, 23, have died after a boat conveying them and five other passengers capsized in Ahoada Town, Ahoada East Local Government Area of Rivers State.

PUNCH Metro learnt that the incident occurred around 7:45 p.m. on Saturday while the victims were returning home from work.

Speaking with journalists on Sunday, the victims' elder brother, Abraham Gogochuri, said the siblings boarded a canoe to cross a river to their residence at Aliya (Over Bridge), where a construction company is currently carrying out roadworks.

“They were coming back from work and boarded a boat to cross the river to our house at Aliya (Over Bridge). A construction company is working in the area, but unfortunately, the boat capsized, and my brother and sister drowned,” he said.

According to him, seven passengers were onboard the canoe, but only the two siblings lost their lives.

He blamed the tragedy on the boat's poor condition and the absence of life jackets.

"There were about seven people in the boat, but only the two of them drowned. The boat was not in good condition, and there were no life jackets. That was what led to their deaths," Abraham said.

He described the vessel as a leaking hand-paddled canoe, alleging that it had been patched with wrappers to reduce water seepage.

"We are blaming the construction company because it failed to provide safe boats and life jackets for residents who depend on the waterway. The canoe had been leaking for a long time, yet people had no option but to use it," he alleged.

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Abraham also lamented that a makeshift crossing popularly known as the "monkey bridge" had collapsed and had yet to be reconstructed, leaving residents with no alternative but to travel by unsafe boats.

"There was a monkey bridge here before, but it collapsed and has not been rebuilt. That is why people now depend on these boats. We are calling on the authorities to investigate why there was no safer alternative for residents. We want justice for my late brother and sister," he added.

He disclosed that officers from the Ahoada Police Division visited the family on Sunday as part of ongoing investigations into the incident.

Meanwhile, the paramount ruler of the Ekpeye Ethnic Nation, His Imperial Majesty Kelvin Ngozi, Eze Ekpeye Logbo III (Akalaka XII), expressed sadness over the tragedy.

In a statement issued by his spokesperson, Anamoji Felix, the monarch described the deaths of the two siblings as a painful loss to the Igbu Ehuda Kingdom and the entire Ekpeye nation.

He extended his condolences to the bereaved family, the traditional ruler of Igbu Ehuda Kingdom, Eze Noble Friday Uwoh, and members of the community, praying for God to grant them the strength to bear the loss.

When contacted, the spokesperson for the Rivers State Police Command, Grace Iringe-Koko, said she would verify the incident.

However, the Police Public Relations Officer for the command, ASP Blessing Agabe, later confirmed the incident, stating that the boat operator had been arrested.

“Yes, I can confirm the incident. Two persons died. The boat driver has been taken into custody, and an investigation is ongoing,” Agabe said.

| Dennis Naku