

## 6 students die, others missing in Benue boat mishap



*File image of a boat mishap*

**By Peter Duru**

**Makurdi —No fewer than six persons, mainly students returning to school, have been confirmed dead following a boat mishap at Buruku crossing in Buruku Local Government Area of Benue State.**

**Many others are also still missing after the wooden boat conveying passengers across the river bank late on Monday night.**

**Sources in the area said the tragedy occurred about 11p.m., while the ill-fated boat was en route Buruku end of the river. It was reportedly carrying passengers and vehicles when it capsized midway into the journey.**

**An eyewitness blamed the incident on overloading, describing the situation as avoidable.**

**He said: “The boat, as you know, is a wooden one, and it was carrying passengers and cars across the river to Buruku when it suddenly sank. There were over 45 persons on that boat, including vehicles. It was simply overloaded.**

**“While about 35 passengers were rescued, six deaths, mostly students, have so far been confirmed, with others still unaccounted for. Most of the victims were students returning to schools in Gboko and nearby communities. This is very unfortunate. This tragedy could have been avoided.”**

**He decried what he described as repeated negligence on the waterways, adding: “Every year, we record this kind of tragedy. Authorities will issue statements assuring that it won’t happen again, but nothing concrete is done to ensure the safety of waterway users.”**

**Reacting to the incident, the state Commissioner for Marine and Blue Economy, Mr. Denis Iyaghigba, said he received the news with “grave concern and deep distress,” describing it as a painful reminder of the dangers associated with unsafe and unregulated inland water transport.**

**In a statement by his media aide, Lubem Gena, the commissioner extended his sympathy to the families of the victims and the Buruku community.**

**“Preliminary reports indicate that the mishap occurred in the course of routine river transportation,” he said.**

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**Ivaghigba disclosed that a full-scale investigation has been launched to**

**determine both the immediate and remote causes of the accident.**

**Warning that recklessness and disregard for safety standards would no longer be tolerated, Iyaghighba assured that enforcement measures would be strengthened. These include vessel inspections, operator licensing, passenger safety education, and closer monitoring of river transport activities across the state.**

**Efforts to reach the Chairman of Buruku LGA, Mr. Raymond Zege were unsuccessful at press time. Similarly, the Police Public Relations Officer, Udeme Edet, who promised to respond to inquiries, had yet to do so.**