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Countryman

EFCC: I WILL STEP ON TOES
— MRS WAZIRI



5 die, 50 trapped

•In Abuja building collapse

Erasmus Alaneme, Akor Sylvester and Ben Ukeji, *Abuja*

A three-storey building under construction allegedly belonging to the former Delta State governor, James Ibori, yesterday in Abuja collapsed, killing five people while over 50 were trapped in the rubbles of the building.

At the site of the collapsed building said to be an aperture of other five-storey building located along the Mafemi Crescent, Jabi, Abuja, eye witnesses said more than 100 persons said to be labourers on the site, hawkers of sachet water, snacks and food vendors were trapped.

Giving a more horrifying account of the calamity, a survivor who was rescued from the rubbles three hours after the incident by sympathizers, Salisu Naibi, said there were about 20 others, though he could not confirm if they were dead or alive.

Naibi, who was quickly rushed to a nearby mosque by some Muslim faithful, was full of praises to God for his miraculous survival.

Although about five of the survivors were said to have been immediately rushed to the hospital by sympathisers, another survivor, who crept out of the debris, Hamisu Abdullahi, stated that they were working inside the building when it fell on them.

According to him, the whole floors were filled with labourers, who were being supervised by the site engineer, adding that they were still inside, including the engineer.

Hamisu said that he crawled out of the building after regaining his consciousness, through the back of the structure.

Another labourer climbed up the collapsed structures and sighted the engineer's slippers.

"See engineer slippers, I believe he is dead as I have been ringing his phone without getting any response," the man said.

Some of the labourers regroup in front of the collapsed building and were seeing calling on the crowd to get help.

"Get cranes to pull out the irons and roof so that we can save other persons trapped inside there for over two hours," a labourer said.

Also a young girl Aisha who cried uncontrollably said that her father and his friend were among those trapped in the building, crying for help to ensure that his father was rescued.

Aisha who spoke in Hausa language said that her mother was not around and that she

escaped being trapped in the building because she left the building just about five minutes before the building came down.

The buildings said to have collapsed few minutes before 3pm, according to Aisha would have killed herself and her mother but for God. "I left this house (pointing to one of them) before they collapsed, my father and my friend are still there and I don't know if they were alive or not," she said.

Another eyewitness, Sunday Audu, said that he heard one of the trapped survivors telling his uncle that he was alive, but having headache, adding that everywhere is dark.

Also, one Mr. Lucky Ariga who identified himself as a plumber on site of the collapsed said that danger signal was noticed when the building started shaking but that nobody had time to warn others as everybody started running and jumping out before the building finally collapsed.

On who owns the building, Lucky said that though they have information that the building allegedly belong to former Delta state Governor, James Ibori but that it was a retired Police Officer who hails from Delta State that supervises the construction work.

"My brother I work here as a plumber. I was working when i noticed that the building was shaking. I jumped from the second floor down and ran out. I thank God that i survived.

"It is paining me because I saw one woman who just came here to sell sachet water to us, she is inside there, I don't know whether she will survive. They told us that the building we are working on belonged to Ibori but it is one retired Police Commissioner from Delta State that comes to check our work here.

As at 7.30pm yesterday, rescue work was still going on with Dantata, Julius Berger, Arab Contractors and others still at the site.

FCT Minister, Inspector General of Police (IGP), Mike Okiro, AMAC Chairman, FRSC Corp Marshal, among other had visited the scene as at press time.

An ambitious building project that would have housed Abuja's largest single shopping plaza collapsed yesterday, killing 10 people and trapping about 50 others.

Among the victims were menial labourers, and women and kid hawkers; some of them had been on the project for the last four months or thereabouts that the project has lasted. An assortment of wares, mainly edibles, was also trapped in the wreckage.

In his reaction to the incident, FCT Minister, Dr. Aliyu Modibbo Umar, yesterday ordered the immediate arrest and prosecution of the owner(s) of the collapsed building.

Modibbo, who spoke dramatically after climbing a police van to address the mammoth crowd who besieged the scene of the incident, said that the incident was unfortunate and regrettable, describing it as a national disaster.

The minister who was told that over 100 persons were still trapped in the rumble said his administration would take necessarily steps to avert a recurrence of the ugly incident.

"I have already ordered the arrest of the owner of the property; the police have already started a manhunt for the person. It is unfortunate that people have continued to violate our development standard and guidelines. But the government in discharging its duty will arrest the people involved."

However, effort to get the officials of the Development Control Agency of the FCT to confirm the real owner of the ill-fated shopping mall proved abortive as they kept telling Daily Champion though the file, they are yet to know the owner of building.

It will be pertinent to recall that two similar incidents had occurred in the same Jabi District

of Abuja this year alone. The Tuesday disaster brings to three the total of high profile collapse of buildings that claimed several lives.

The FCT administration had after the collapsed of the previous two building threatened to drag to court the owners as well as any other developer whose property collapse in the FCT.

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