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**Countryman****Building collapse! : Death toll hits 11*****'I rescued 2 kids playing with my children, but could not save my son' —Survivor mum***

TUNBOSUN OGUNDARE and STAN OKENWA

THOUGH I was able to rescue Emeka and Esther who are my children's friends who came to play with them, I was unable to save my son Joseph."

These were the words of Mrs Sarah Akainza, one of the lucky survivors of the four –storey building that collapsed on 35 Ojerinde Street, Idi Araba, Lagos.

Meanwhile, death toll on the tragedy has risen to 11 from two recorded on Tuesday.

Also many survivors who sustained injuries are receiving treatment in various hospitals including Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH), Ikeja and Mushin and Isolo General Hospitals.

Recalling the incident in an interview with Daily Champion, Sarah said she was cooking food for her two children who had just returned from school when the building suddenly caved in.

"I left them in the parlour playing, as they were with their two friends while I was in the kitchen cooking. But I didn't know what brought me to the palour when we heard a strange noise.

"Though I was able to rescue Emeka and Esther, who are my children's friends who came to play with them, I was unable to save my son", she said.

Sarah, 28, is from Balyelsa State.

"I did not know why I came to the palour but it was as soon as I entered there from the kitchen that the building caved in."

Sarah had lived in the two-room –apartment in the building for nine years.

She said they were five in number in her apartment at the time of the incident. Herself, her two sons and their two friends.

"The debris was almost fallen on our heads but doors and fridge prevented it. I began to shout for help. But there was virtually nothing anybody could do because we were looking at people outside and they too were looking at us but the iron rods prevented us from escape.

"So I had to ask for a sledge harmer with which I broke away every obstacle on our way and for us to be able to come out from the building one after the other. " I was calling my son Joseph, six years old, but he was only answering faintly as something had hooked him.

At this point the distraught mother burst into tears.

Another survivor, Deborah Akpan, 16, a student of May Flower Secondary School Ikenne, Ogun State, said. If not for the ongoing teachers' strike, she would have been in school.

She was with her younger brother, a four-year-old Otto, in their apartment when the building went down and as of the press time, the parents could not ascertain whether Otto was dead or alive.

Recalling the ordeal, Deborah who sustained deep cut on the right palm and bruises in other parts of her body, said "All happened suddenly and started with a loud bang and before I knew what was happening, I had been covered by debris. I couldn't move any part of my body except my neck and I was shouting for help."

Also, the story of Mrs. Loreta Edozona and her eight-month-old baby, Divine was also pathetic.

Loreta said she was returning from the bathroom to the room to dress-up her baby when the house caved in.

But her mother, who was around to nurse the child was at the backyard trapped.

It was God that saved me and my child because I tried to pull out my legs from the debris for several minutes and I couldn't because the volume of the debris was so much and heavy. But when people came around, they assisted and rescued us out but I cannot say up till now what would have happened to my mother," she said.

Meanwhile, the Lagos State government yesterday said it would acquire the site of the collapsed building at Idi Araba.

Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Mr. Opeyemi Bamidele, who said this in Alausa Ikeja, said government, would enforce the same law which enabled it to acquire other collapsed buildings including the Bank of Industry on Broad Street, Lagos Island.

He said strict compliance to the state physical planning law, will go a long way in averting similar situations in the future.

Similarly, a manhunt is on to locate the whereabouts of the developer of the collapsed building.

Chairman of Mushin Local Government Area, Babatunde Adepitan, said four buildings have also been sealed in the neighbourhood having been certified unfit for human habitation.

At the scene yesterday, officials of Nigeria Redcross Society (NRCS), who were on standby told Daily Champion at the site that in addition to 10 rescued on Tuesday, another 25 persons were brought out alive with minor and major injuries.

Mrs Josephine Akinyemi, Lagos State Secretary of all the rescued persons including an eight-month baby boy (Divine Emmanuel), a couple, a middle-aged man Eyo and other have been moved to a nearby hospitals for treatment.

The hospitals are Aishat Specialist Hospital (ASHL) on Fagbenro Street, Lagos State University Teaching Hospital LASUTH, Isolo General Hospital and Mushin General Hospital.

When Daily Champion visited ASHL, Chief Medical Director, Dr Ayantola Oladipo Isaac, confirmed receiving 25 patients He said all those brought to the hospital have not only been stabilized but have since been moved to Isolo and Mushin General Hospital on the express request of the local government chairman.

Ayantola said the council boss, who expressed happiness on the efforts of ASHL directed him to forward his bills to his office for settlement.

He however said majority of the victims suffered heavy injury including multiple fractures, internal hemorrhage, bruises, compound injuries and stress.

The doctor said many of the survivors may stay up to six months in the hospital.

"Those that may stay longer in the hospital include victim that suffered serious fractures and internal hemorrhage."

One of the sympathizers at the scene, Mr. Kenneth Agbegbe, 32, who claimed to be the first tenant of the structure in 2000 said of a possible collapse emerged since 2007, saying "if you touch the wall, it breaks easily."

The Commissioner for Physical Planning and Urban Development, Mr Francisco Abosede, who visited the scene expressed shock but told the crowd that the most important issue for now is the rescue operation, adding that the ministry will leave no stone unturned in determining the actual cause of the collapse so as to advise builders and property developers in the state.

Rescue operation by a combined team of the Red Cross, National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA), Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency (LASEPA), and youths in the area continued yesterday evening and throughout the night. The Red Cross said with the speed of the works "we may reach ground zero before Thursday morning."

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