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Lagos collapsed building: Death toll hits 31

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Rescue work going on at the site of the collapsed building in Ebute Metta, Lagos yesterday

Islamic rites, hours after the incident.

According to Mallam Abdul, the three-storey building with a big warehouse on its ground floor housed between 40 and 50 Hausa people who were mostly workers within the compound. He said the Hausa community had already contacted families of the victims in the Northern states.

Besides, the absence of rescue operators at the scene throughout yesterday reduced the chances of some trapped victims being rescued alive. Two of the trapped victims were said to have made desperate calls on their mobile phones at about 12 midnight on Sunday. Visibly shaken Alli, an indigene of Kano state, told journalists that he was rescued from the rubble at about 9am on Sunday, six hours after the building caved in. Alli, who had bruises on his head, hands and legs, said he occupied a room on the collapsed building's second floor with his wife, who also survived.

Recounting how it all happened, Ali said, "I was deep asleep with my wife. I did not know how it happened but when I woke up, I felt a heavy weight on me. Tried as I could to turn to the other side, the weight on me prevented me. The entire place was dark and wet. I could hear voices but could not fathom what they were saying. I could have stayed for eternity when all of a sudden I heard people shouting that they have found someone alive. That was how I was dragged out with my wife. About 18 of my brothers from the North were brought out of the rubble, dead. But they were kept away from the Red Cross and buried according to Islamic rites. We did not want them taken to the mortuary because there would not be any money with which to pay the mortuary bills." Pointing to a section of the rubble which once served as shelter for him and his wife, Alli further stated that the building housed over sixty tenants, with some of them sleeping in the veranda and balcony.

Ojo Jimoh, another victim, said more than fifty people were living in the building before the collapse. "We were more than fifty living in the building, so if they said that they recued thirty six and eight people are dead, then they are more people still trapped. You can see that we the victims are the ones using shovels and diggers to search for missing persons since morning. The excavator that came yesterday has left and we have been left to suffer alone.

Mr. Jimoh said Omolayo Thomas, the Director of the Mainland Local Government Elders and Advisory Council who represented the Council Chairman, said the local government will only pay compensation. "I want you to know that there is nothing that the council can do than to compensate the victims. This is a federal government building. We hear that the building which was a warehouse was reconstructed into two-storey residential building. The persons involved should be dealt with," Thomas said.

Survivors also said the building showed signs of imminent collapse, because whenever it rained, the building vibrated. However, survivor Alli, who said he moved into the building a year ago, said they never anticipated that the building would cave in that soon.

Meanwhile, Lagos State Commissioner for Physical Planning and Urban Development, Town Planner Francisco Abosede while responding to the disaster said his ministry has been carrying out routine checks on buildings suspected to be defective across the state, but that they used to encounter hostility from occupants of suspected defective buildings that belong to the Federal Government.

General Manager of the Lagos State Emergency Management Authority (LASEMA) Dr. Ige Osanyintolu however debunked reports on the number of casualties, saying the number of death recorded is seven and not 13 as reported by some national dailies yesterday.

Chairman of the State Red Cross Society, Deacon Timothy whose team has been on ground since Sunday confirmed there were many injured people when his team arrived the scene. They were still around to provide medical assistance to the injured persons, he said.

The death toll in the collapsed two-storey building which occurred at the Lagos Terminus, Iddo in Ebute-Metta area of Lagos, at the weekend, rose to 31 yesterday.

When our reporter visited the scene, he learned that an additional eighteen bodies had been recovered from the debris. Survivors told Daily Trust that many of the victims were from the Northern states as well as from neighbouring countries such as Togo and Cameroon.

One survivor, identified as Nura Alli, said some of the victims were buried according to

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