

## MYSTERIOUS FIRE KILLS 8 WEDDING GUESTS IN EX-MINISTER'S HOME



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Relations and sympathisers are still perplexed by the mysterious fire that engulfed the Abuja home of former Minister of State for Education, Hajia Bintu Ibrahim Musa, on Monday, killing eight people, among them guests at a wedding that took place two days earlier.

Survivors of the inferno at the Area 8 Garki residence could not say what sparked the fire around midnight as most of them who had already fallen asleep were roused by the thick smoke that engulfed the two-storey building. The ex-minister lost two of her daughters and two grandchildren in the fire.

"We were sleeping here in the living room just over there when (we heard people) shouting," one of the survivors, a tearful Jamila Kasimu told Weekly Trust, pointing at the corner where some of the victims were sleeping when the fire started. "The whole place was filled with choking smoke, so we immediately started calling out to everybody to run out."

The residence was filled to the brim with guests, because friends and relatives of Hajia Bintu who had come from far and near for the wedding of one her daughters on Friday were yet to return to their bases, she said.

Jamila said most of the children were trapped in the bedrooms on the top floor of the two-storey building and could not be immediately rescued in the confusion of the night. Medical experts said the victims were killed by the smoke they inhaled.

Survivors said neighbours who came to rescue the occupants of the building could not do much as they also had to escape through the second floor windows to safety because of the intensity of the fire.

The pain and grief of the tragedy were still palpable in the air at the weekend. Sympathisers thronged in and out of the place while some of the survivors stood in groups discussing the misfortune.

One of the sympathisers at the residence, who gave his name as Jacob Alabi, was inconsolable as he told Weekly Trust that he was a private lesson teacher to the deceased children.

He fought back tears as he gave the names of his former pupils — Zara Adam, Aisha Abubakar, Anur, Sudaiz, Umar and small Alhaji — stressing that they were happy children.

The former minister, who was one of the lucky survivors, received treatment at a private hospital in Maitama District of Abuja, along with three other relatives. Hospital authorities said Hajia Bintu was too emotionally distraught to speak with the press.

The Hassan Hospital and Diagnostic Centre Maitama, where the former minister was treated said in a statement that Hajia Bintu and three other relatives "sustained inhalational injuries following a fire in their house while they were asleep."

Chief Medical Director, Dr Shibahul Hassan, said the eight bodies brought in from the site of the fire were transferred to the National Hospital for autopsy to determine cause of death.

The deceased were buried late afternoon on Tuesday according to Islamic rites at the National Mosque, Abuja.

The fire service were able to put out the fire only after it had razed the entire second floor of the building.

Weekly Trust also gathered that men of the police force visited the house on Wednesday as part of investigations to determine the cause of the fire.

Checks showed that the hospitalized victims, who were all discharged on Wednesday, are recuperating at a

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