

By Hussein Yahaya

Wike orders owner's arrest as 2 killed, many injured in Abuja building collapse

At least two people lost their lives with 20 others injured when a two-storey building collapsed on Wednesday night at Lagos Street, Garki village, Abuja.

The building located at Lagos Street, Garki Village, Abuja, had at least 39 residents, with two certified dead, and 37 rescued and taken to various hospitals.

City & Crime reports that the building caved in around 11pm on Wednesday amid heavy downpour and rescue operations were initially very slow over the night as there was no immediate access to an excavator and rescue efforts were purely manual.

Speaking at the scene of the incident yesterday, the FCT Minister, Nyesom Wike, ordered the immediate identification and arrest of the owner of the building.

Wike, who noted that original residents of the area were designated for resettlement, however wondered why for years, the FCT Administration could not carry out such resettlement.

While he applauded the rescue efforts, Wike said; "It is unfortunate that we woke this morning to the very disturbing news of this building collapse. It is not what we contemplated. Let me thank the agencies, particularly NEMA and FEMA, that have supported us to rescue not less than 37 lives. It is unfortunate that we lost two lives. I will appeal to the permanent secretary to make sure that funds are raised to pay the hospital bills of those who were rescued so that we do not lose any more persons, and this should be done immediately.

"Secondly, these are the things we have been saying; nobody knows whose turn it will be, therefore, when government says it will take actions in areas we believe there are illegal



■ Rescue operations at the scene

Photo: Onyekachukwu Obi

developments or buildings that do not comply with the standard codes, it is not as if anybody has any personal vendetta but for me it is for us to do the right thing.

"I don't know why it has taken so long that the FCTA has not resettled them and so we will take immediate action to see that the indigenous people of this place are resettled and then the government has to plan out this place.

"When government says take a building plan, it is not to suffer anybody but to make sure that everyone is protected. Cities are planned to forestall these kinds of occurrences. Imagine buildings without approval. I will ask that we must identify and arrest the owner of this property. It is very important.

"Government will, of course, take over this area and make sure no further development is carried out here. I want all

the stakeholders here to please work with government in the interest of everybody. No one has come here to say I like A, I don't like B. I know sometimes government's decisions may not be too comfortable with the people, but in the long run, it is in the interest of the people. Now we are all gathered here and none of us is happy we are here. These are the things we are trying to forestall. Again, I sympathise with those who lost dear lives, while government will pick up the bills of all those in the hospital. We will also support the rescue efforts and ensure that they get to the last level and rescue everyone still trapped in the rubble."

On his part, Director General of FCT Emergency Management Agency FEMA, Dr Abbas Idriss, said 37 persons were rescued at the scene of the collapsed structure.

"While thirty-seven persons

have so far been rescued and evacuated to hospital, others reportedly still trapped. Rescue teams and others are on the ground. Rescue operations are on but slowly due to ongoing rain." They are making frantic efforts at getting an excavator to remove people from the rubble," he added.

Also speaking, the Director, Department of Development Control, Mukhtar Galadima, explained that the building had no planning approval because the area is meant for resettlement.

"The building is located within the Garki indigenous settlement. The building had two suspended floors; one used for commercial activities while the other floors were used as residential accommodation. The building caved in yesterday (Wednesday) and 37 persons were rescued

"The status of the place is that it is not a planned area so the development had no planning approval. In fact, the area is meant for resettlement from here to Apo resettlement town," he said.

One of occupants of the building, Ms Glory Perekeme, who operates a restaurant and a bar at the building, said she lost about N5 million as she could not take anything from her restaurant.

"I closed for business around 10 p.m. and was on my way home when I received a call that the building had collapsed and my investment was gone.

"I am still in shock; and I don't even know where to start from.

"I really need assistance. Government should come to our aid so we can start all over again," she said.