

13 Months After Oworonshoki Demolition, Victims Seek Answers, Help



residents of oworonshoki

By Dotun Omisakin

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Over one year after the demolition of over 1,000 houses at Oke-Eri, Odunfa Lane, Ogo-Oluwa, Precious Seed and Coker environs of Oke Eri, and Mosafejo communities in Oworonshoki, Kosofe Local Area of Lagos State, the memory of the incident remains fresh in the minds of the victims, who say they are still traumatised.

Thursday, July 27, 2023 remains unforgettable to the victims of the demolition, who woke up to the sound of bulldozers crushing the structures in the hitherto serene community.

As the exercise spread fast, sending shockwaves to residents, some of them confronted the officials of the task force, seeking to know why the Lagos State government decided to render them homeless.

Weekend Trust reports that though some of the victims have returned to the land to erect makeshift structures, they are still living in fear and uncertainty.

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Some of the victims who spoke to Weekend Trust under the aegis of the Coalition of Victims of Oworonshoki Illegal Demolition and Take It Back, recounted tales of woe.

Speaking on behalf of the victims, the coordinator of the group, Opeyemi Ogunlami, stressed that the demolition exercise destroyed a lot of livelihoods, disrupted their children's education, just as it led to loss of many lives.

He said, "We also want to bring it to public notice that since the illegal and forceful eviction of residents here, we have recorded 13 deaths, which include four children, two men and seven women. This is in addition to thousands of people who have been subjected to trauma."

He accused Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of not being sympathetic towards the plight of the victims, adding that the pleas for him to come to their aid had not yielded any fruit.

"It is very sad that up till date, the Lagos State government has turned a deaf ear to the plight of the victims of this demolition. Instead of awarding compensations and resettling the thousands that have been unjustly displaced, the state government has continued to issue threats to evict more people from the community," he said.

He said the victims would continue to agitate through both the judiciary and other means to press their demands, including the need to recover their land and compensation for their demolished buildings.

"We call on the Lagos State government to come to our aid," he added.



residents at the demolished site

The demolition made me a widower – Joshua Vandí

Speaking to *Weekend Trust*, Joshua Vandí, whose house was situated on Number 33, Odunfa Street before it was demolished, expressed grief over the death of his pregnant wife, Ladi at Afolabi Memorial Hospital, Oworo road.

The father of three narrated that his wife suffered complications arising from the trauma she went through after the demolition took away her source of livelihood, lamenting that his family has been going through a harrowing experience.

“It has been very difficult to cope. I have three kids. After the demolition I was assisted to live in an uncompleted bungalow, and whenever it rains, it beats my children, which makes them ill. Nobody, especially the state government, shows concern. Most of the time, I sleep hungry.

“It was also a difficult task to take my wife’s corpse to Adamawa. They don’t know how I suffered.

“I don’t know why anyone should treat human beings as if they are nothing. I am still in pain after one year that my house was demolished. The state government doesn’t know how my children are living because theirs are comfortable.

“I want the government to tell us who authorised the demolition. I also want to know our fate now.

“When they are canvassing for votes they will come to us with promises, but after the election they will destroy our properties. They should pay us for our properties because this is our land,” he said.

‘My wife, children sleep in church’

Also recounting their ordeal, Amos Oyetokun, whose 38-year-old residence was demolished, resulting in the separation of his wife and four children said, “I am not sure if it was the state government or individuals that came to demolish our buildings, but whosoever was behind the exercise did not do well. Without any information or notice, they brought a task force to destroy the place,” he said.

He said his wife and three of his children now sleep in church while he and one of the children manage in the makeshift structure he erected upon the advice of his lawyer.

“When we went to court and were told to go back to our land, it was I and my daughter that returned to the makeshift building. I am just there,” he said.

Some victims also said they made efforts to get across to the government agencies but that they claimed they did not know of the demolition.

A resident of Precious Seed, Mrs Adedoyin Ajalekoko, said they had gone to the Lagos State House of Assembly five times within three months begging for answers on why their houses were demolished, but that they were not given any concrete response.

He said, “We also went to the governor, who said he didn’t know anything about it. We further approached Oba Oworonshoki and he said the same thing.

“I want to plead to all of us not to vacate. Let’s stay on our land because when we leave, they will come and build on it.”

Also, Olanrewaju Oluwasegun, a leader at Idi-Araba Mosafejo community said, “When we went to the House of Assembly, they said there would be a solution to it, but since last year till now, we have not heard anything. We believe the state government has authority over every person.

“The state government cannot deny that they didn’t know anything about the demolition. We have lived here peacefully for over 60 years. “We are not happy. The situation makes me cry.”

I’m not happy seeing the condition of my people – Chief Olorunwa

The traditional ruler of the affected communities, Chief Emmanuel Olorunwa, told Weekend Trust that he was not happy over the condition of his subjects. He called on the state government to come to their aid.

Chief Olorunwa said he was shocked when the demolition began, adding that efforts were made to meet the highest traditional authority in the area, Oba Saliu, who said he didn’t know those behind the action.

“We were surprised to see government officials who came here to demolish houses. We were not informed, so we went to Oba to find out where the order came from, but he said he didn’t know anything about it.

“I am not happy about the condition of my people. I don’t like it because some of the people do not have where to sleep. I am begging the state government to render help. We need to know where the order came from,” he said.

We're gathering documents to approach court – Coalition leader

A leader of Take It Back in Kosofe Local Government Area, Towolawi Jamiu, said the group will soon begin a legal action to reclaim their lands, adding that their lawyers have started collecting documents to present as evidence.

He said, “We are still trying to collate all the documents before we storm the court. Although, some of the victims have gone to court as individuals, we want to go as a group.”

They are illegal occupants – Oba Saliu

The Oloworo of Oworonshoki, Oba Babatunde Saliu, in a chat with our correspondent, described the victims as illegal occupants, saying the state government acquired the lands from his family during the Western Region era.

He further explained that the state government had earmarked the place for a project before people started building on it.

Oba Saliu said, “The land belonged to my family, but it was acquired by the state government. People started building on the land because the state government had not started the project it earmarked for it.

“The houses built there were illegal structures and the government now has a need for it. So, it is government's property and there is nothing we can do about it.”

He urged the victims to re-present their documents to authenticate their claim that the land belongs to them.

He, however, expressed sympathy with the victims and pleaded with the state government to alleviate their suffering by providing alternative accommodation for them.

“I sympathise with the victims. If I had money I would have built another place for them. We beg the government to help them to relocate,” the traditional ruler said.

Reacting to the development, the Lagos State Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Gbenga Omotosho, said the government may not provide any compensation, especially if they built without approval or on drainage channels.

He, however, promised to find out the status of the victims from the Ministry of Physical Planning and Urban Development and get back to our correspondent, but he was yet to get back as at press time.