

How 4 FIRS Senior Staff, Others Died In Lagos Fire



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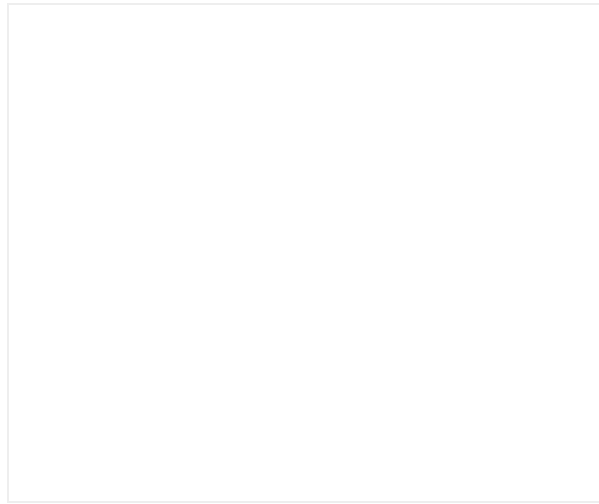
A devastating fire that swept through the Afriland Towers located along the Broad Street area of Lagos on Tuesday claimed the lives of four Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS)

directors and a manager.

The incident occurred on Tuesday night at the high-rise building, which houses several businesses and organisations, including the Lagos office of the FIRS.



According to eyewitnesses, the fire started from the inverter room but quickly spread to other floors, fueled by strong winds and the largely wooden partitions in most of the offices in the building.



The Lagos State Fire and Rescue Service, Federal Fire Service, the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency (LASEMA), the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and other emergency responders were quickly deployed to the scene, but their efforts were hindered by the intensity of the fire and the difficulty in accessing the upper floors.

The victims, who were working on the sixth and seventh floors of the building, were identified as: Mrs Ekelikhostse George (Assistant Director), Mr David Sunday-Jatto (assistant director), Mrs Nkem Onyemelukwe (senior manager) and Mr Peter Ifaranmaye (manager).

Some workers at the ill-fated building have expressed deep sorrow over the loss, describing it as a “devastating blow” to the entire workforce.



One of the workers, who identified himself simply as John, said those who were present at the time of the incident panicked when the fire alarm started ringing.

“At first, we thought it was something that would be easily contained by the tower’s internal emergency workers, but the smoke from the source of fire quickly spread, covering the staircase.

“Those who were on the ground floor, up to the second floor, raced out of the building, but many people sustained varying degrees of injuries. I was able to quickly exit the building. At this time, the light stopped working. Those who ran down the stairs tripped and fell while climbing down the staircase.

“We have been thrown into deep mourning by the loss of these dedicated and hardworking senior staff of FIRS,” he said.

‘How they died’

Sources told our correspondent that the four FIRS officers died of suffocation while trying to escape from the building.

Besides, rescue operations were said to be slow with workers in the building scampering for safety and falling in the process.

“Thick smoke had already engulfed the building as a result of the fire. It is unfortunate that there were no functional smoke detectors in the building. This is really avoidable. It is so sad that our fire readiness is nothing to write home about,” another eyewitness said.

It was learnt that one of the directors, David Sunday-Jatto, who died in the inferno, was in the office briefly to hand over, having been transferred to another branch.

“He was an unassuming person, he was just transferred elsewhere and he came to the office on that day to hand over formally to his successor when the incident happened and took his life alongside eight others,” sources narrated.

Shola Oladimeji, a petty trader opposite the building, told our correspondent that those who escaped from the building were already exhausted and were choking as a result of the thick smoke from the fire.

“You can imagine that some of the trapped workers jumped down from the third and fourth floors of the building. It was very horrific because everything started, and within minutes it had spread,” she said.

The incident has sent shockwaves throughout the entire area, with many traders taking to social media to express their condolences and outrage over the tragedy.

FIRS response

The management and staff of the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), in a statement, expressed deep mourning and grief over the death of four staff members in the fire incident .



A statement by Dare Adekanmbi, Special Adviser on Media to the FIRS chairman, gave the names of the affected staff as Mrs Ekelikhostse George (Assistant Director), Mr David Sunday-Jatto (assistant director), Mrs Nkem Onyemelukwe (senior manager) and Mr Peter Ifaranmaye (manager).

“It is with a heavy heart that FIRS announces the tragic loss of four of its staff members during the fire incident at Afriland Towers, Broad Street, Lagos, on Tuesday.

“FIRS is one of the tenants occupying the towers, with our Medium Tax Audit and Onikan Emerging Tax Office housed on the sixth and seventh floors.

“Our Security and Safety officials quickly mobilised and contacted the fire service as soon as they were alerted. On getting to the scene, thick dark smoke was already billowing out of the building.

“The Management and entire staff are in deep shock and sorrow over the development. They offer their condolences to the grieving families and are in touch with the families of our departed colleagues whose commitment to excellence, dedication and professionalism were never in doubt. We will provide all the necessary support at this trying time.



“We are working in collaboration with all relevant agencies in Lagos to get to the root cause of the unfortunate incident. While this is going on, we will be reviewing safety measures across FIRS offices in both rented and owned buildings nationwide,” the statement said.

Elumelu reacts

Chairman of Heirs Holdings, Tony Elumelu, has disclosed that United Bank for Africa (UBA) staff members died in the fire outbreak.

Speaking in a statement on Wednesday, Elumelu, who is also the chairman of UBA, said he was shattered by the fire outbreak, describing the inferno as a devastating incident.

UBA has a space in the six-storey building.

Elumelu, who did not disclose the number of casualties recorded in the incident, said: “No words can capture the magnitude of this loss — not for their families who loved them, not for the friends who valued them, and not for those of us who worked beside them.

“Yesterday was a stark reminder of what truly matters: our irreplaceable people, those who walk through our doors each day and share our mission.”

The UBA boss further revealed that he learnt of the fire outbreak while on his way to the United States, en route to New York for the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

He, however, said he had cut short his foreign trip to return to Lagos as “a mark of respect to our lost colleagues.”

Elumelu, who enjoined all Heirs Holdings staff to reach out to those receiving treatment, added: “In the coming days, we will convene colleagues in a memorial to honour the memories of the departed, as we provide support to their families.”

He also thanked emergency responders and first aid workers, as well as members of the public, for showing courage and compassion.



Lagos fire service

The Lagos Fire and Rescue Service said the fire started around 1.38 on Tuesday from the inverter room.

Ogabi Olajide, Deputy Controller General, Lagos State Fire and Rescue Service, in a chat with our correspondent, stated that the rescue operation was activated as soon as the alert was received that there was a fire outbreak at a six-storey building on Afriland Tower, Broad Street, Lagos Island.

“The call was received at 13:38 hours, and Fire crews from Ebute Elefun Fire Station and Sari Iganmu Fire Station responded.

“The Fire originated in the inverter room located in the basement of the building, while smoke has spread across multiple floors and engulfed the structure.

“A good number of the occupants of the building were evacuated by emergency responders, while firefighting operations were ongoing.



“A total of nine casualties were rescued. Five individuals have been successfully resuscitated. Several others escaped unhurt,” he added.