

Survivors, experts blame slow response

From Eugene Agha, Peter Moses and Gbenga Adebayo, Lagos and Idowu Isamotu (Abuja)

Survivors of the Tuesday's fire outbreak at Afriland Towers in Lagos have blamed the incident on slow emergency response.

This is just as has the death toll has risen to ten.

The six-storey building, located on Broad Street, Lagos Island, houses several corporate offices.

United Capital Plc, which occupies the third and fourth floors of the building, confirmed on Thursday that six of its employees died in the incident.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) had confirmed that it lost two assistant directors and two managers to the incident.

During the incident, many occupants of the building were reportedly trapped, with some jumping from windows to escape the inferno.

The institute of safety professionals yesterday called on governments and businesses to prepare for the emerging realities in high-rise building maintenance with the fast-paced adoption of alternative energy sources.

Some of the survivors of the incident, who spoke to *Daily*

Trust yesterday, described the emergency response as "slow and inadequate."

They alleged that the initial response to the fire was woefully "inadequate", saying that emergency services took too long to arrive at the scene.

They also claimed that the response time of building safety officers was equally slow.

One of the survivors, who spoke to our correspondent on condition of anonymity, said

that the first responders were area boys who were assisted by some workers.

Another survivor, who simply identified himself simply as Taiwo, said: "We were on our own for a long time. People were jumping from the building, and we were trying to help them, but the emergency services were nowhere to be found."

A cleaner in the building, who also survived the incident, said she was trapped inside the

building and had thought that she was going to die.

"But luckily, some people outside helped me escape. If not for them, I would not have been alive today," she said.

Another survivor also stated: "This tragedy could have been avoided if the emergency services had responded quickly. We need to learn from this and make sure it never happens again."



■ Rescue operation at the scene of the fire outbreak at Afriland Towers in Lagos State on Tuesday

Photo: Benedict Uwalaka

Safety professionals bemoan high-rise building maintenance