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A torch of life... and death in Warri

From Chido Okafor, Warri

WHO will convince little Baby Jacob that ours is not a world of fire and brimstone?

He was only two weeks, five days old here when an innocent attempt by his mother to refill kerosene lamp sparked an explosion and a ball of fire. It engulfed everything in sight.

Now Baby Jacob lay among the dead and dying in a Warri, Delta State hospital.

Official sources have blamed the killer kerosene on adulteration by hoodlums.

Governor Emmanuel Uduaghan yesterday ordered the security agencies in Warri to track down those responsible for the "killer kerosene" circulating in the town.

Uduaghan, who visited the intensive care unit of the Warri Central Hospital where all victims were being treated, expressed sadness that criminals could be so heartless as to adulterate kerosene used by the citizenry.

Uduaghan disclosed that about 11 victims have so far died in the last one month in different cases of kerosene explosion within Warri and environs.

Two of the victims reportedly died last Friday night, while three others died within the same period.

Uduaghan said the conclusion at the weekly state security meeting was that the killer kerosene emanated from hoodlums who vandalise condensate pipelines and mix the substance with some quantity of kerosene and sell to the unsuspecting public as kerosene.

The Governor who chatted with several of the victims yesterday ordered the State Security Services (SSS) to trace the source of the killer kerosene, warning that the

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culprits would be made to face the full wrath of the law.

He said all the kerosene in Warri and environs were brought in from Lagos, adding that some criminal elements cashed in on the scarcity of the commodity in the town to begin to adulterate real kerosene with condensate which is a highly inflammable substance got from vandalised pipelines of Shell, Chevron and the Nigeria Gas Company (NGC).

The scene at the hospital yesterday was pathetic, as several of the victims lay writhing in pain. The most touching was that of agonizing scene of a two-week old baby who was severely burnt when the mother, Mrs. Mabel Jacob, 55, tried to refill her lamp following a public power outage.

According to Jacob the moment she ignited a match stick and brought it near the lamp there was a huge explosion which engulfed her single room apartment in which three members of the family were.

Mrs. Stella Akpeni, another victim who suffered 100 per cent burn by the fire, said she and her three children (aged between two and seven years) were in the kitchen when she lit the stove, which exploded.

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