

TheMetroSection

Landlady, another woman die, many injured as four-hour fire guts storey building in Ajegunle, Lagos

How bed-ridden mummy died in Ajegunle inferno

Our landlady, Mummy Queen, had stroke and was bedridden. None of her children was at home to assist her. Mama Rukewe's body was found at the staircase after the fire had been put out

By David Ibemere

RESIDENTS of No. 44, Ijaiye Street in Ajegunle, Ajeromi Ifelodun Council of Lagos State, retired to bed on Saturday night without any foreboding of anything unpleasant happening.

Some of them stayed up late till about 11.00p.m. discussing a thanksgiving service one of their neighbours would be having the next day.

But it turned out there was not much really to be happy about the next day as their one-storey building, which was home to many families, was engulfed in a fire that started at about 1.00a.m., a few hours later.

Their much-loved landlady, Mama Queen, thought to be in her 90s died in the inferno.

A tenant, Mama Rukewe, was also burnt to death, while seven-year-old Chinedu Uzor, along with several residents, are in hospital as a result of injuries they sustained.

Yesterday, the gloom among the tenants was palpable as they lamented the death of their landlady and their fellow tenant, the injuries some of them sustained as well as the loss of virtually whatever household property they had acquired over the years.

"Nothing we did made any difference and the fire had gutted everything in sight long before the Lagos State Fire Service trucks arrived about 5.00 a.m.", 21-year-old Tinu Eme told *The Guardian* as he gazed at the heap of ash and rubble in the place he used to call home.

Fighting unsuccessfully to hold back tears, he said the fire started about 1.00a.m. on Saturday when power supply was restored in the area.

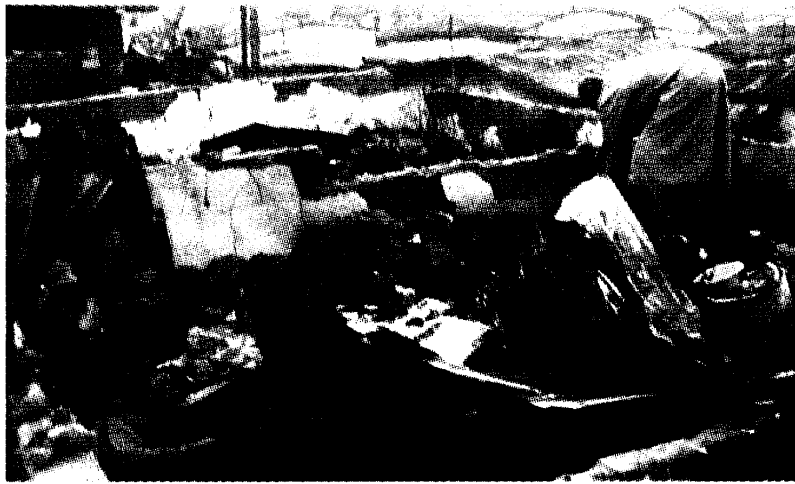
"Everybody was deep asleep when somebody noticed that a part of the building was on fire.

"It spread very quickly, with flames leaping from the ceiling of the building."

"I raised alarm and other tenants ran out.

"Many of us jumped from the first floor because the staircase was already on fire.

"Our landlady, Mummy Queen was



A view of the burnt building



A victim sifting through the rubble



Tinu searching through the rubble of his home

suffering from stroke and had been bedridden. None of her children was at home to assist her downstairs while Mama Rukewe's body was

found at the staircase after the fire had been put out. "I managed to dash upstairs to carry the baby of one of our neighbours

who was inside.

"We could not even bring out a pin from our rooms.

The flames were high and the heat intense.

"Fortunately for us, my mother and siblings managed to escape and my friend and I had to crawl, jump out of the building."

Another resident, John Ochiko, said: "I heard a loud explosion and on running out to find out what the matter was, saw smoke and flames everywhere.

"The fire spread very quickly and in a few seconds, the entire house was ablaze.

"My wife and four children ran out of the house without saving anything. Now, we are homeless with my children in the house of my friends," he said.

A tenant in a near-by house, Ademola Adekunle said neighbours prevented it from spreading to other buildings.

"Without them, the fire would have spread to other buildings and the losses would have been much greater.

The fire fighters came much later, though some of the tenants said they called the Fire Service when it started.

Another tenant, Shola Eniola described their escape from the burning house as a miracle, saying: "It was by the mercy of God that no one in my family was trapped inside."

Amidst tears, Mrs. Gladys Obijuru lamented that all her life's savings and belongings were burnt, as she could not save anything.

"My children's belongings, and all I have over the years gathered, as well as important documents were all destroyed."

Another of the victims, Papa Bisi, told *The Guardian* that all his property, his children's educational materials, documents and cash were burnt.

He called on well-meaning Nigerians, including the Lagos State Governor, Babatunde Fashola (SAN) to come to their aid. "Please come and help us, all our belongings are gone, we have nowhere to go, please save us."

He also praised the efforts of the young men who tried to put out the fire and prevent it from spreading by throwing buckets of water fetched from the gutter, into the roaring flames.

"If not for the determined efforts of those young men around, the story would have been different as more buildings would have been gutted and more people displaced," he said

PHOTOS: DAVID IBEMERE