

# Atiku expresses shock, sadness over Onitsha tanker tragedy

From Chuks Collins and Uzoma Nzeagwu, Awka

**F**ORMER Vice President and chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Atiku Abubakar, has expressed deep shock and sadness at the weekend horrific fuel-laden tanker tragedy at Upper Iweka, Onitsha, Anambra State, that led to loss of lives and property.

In a statement released in Abuja yesterday by his media office, Atiku prayed for the repose of the souls of the scores of deceased persons, while soliciting God's protection for Nigerians nationwide.

"May God accept the souls of the departed into blissful eternity and grant the relatives and families of the deceased bearable fortitude to accept the loss.

"I commiserate with the government and good peo-

- **Condoles with families of victims, Anambra govt**
- **Death toll rises to 70, injured moved to Awka**
- **MASSOB chieftain among the dead**

ple of Anambra State in whose abode this huge loss had taken place," Atiku said.

Meanwhile, rescue operations have commenced barely 24 hours after the incident that killed 69 persons on the spot inside.

A visit to both the scene and hospitals yesterday afternoon showed that individuals, organisations and families move from one hospital to the other, particularly those who were expecting their relations back home from various destinations within the weekend.

The MASSOB said they have identified one of the victims to be a chieftain of the group.

Leader of the group in Anambra North Local Council, Mazi Chris Mocha,

who visited the Onitsha General Hospital yesterday, said the victim identified is one Chief Donatus Nweke, its Regional Administrator in charge of Anambra West Local Council.

Mocha, while pleading with the hospital management at Onitsha, said the 54 year-old Nweke who hails from Amagu village, Amuri in Nkanu East Local Council of Enugu State until his death in the unfortunate incident, was a pioneer member of the movement in Anambra State.

Besides, Vice Chairman of the Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS), Anambra State, Prof. Peter Emeka Katchy, confirmed to newsmen yesterday in his office at Onitsha that one more

person died to bring the death toll to 70, while 29 were still critical in the various hospitals.

He said that Governor Willie Obiano had shortly after visiting the scene on Sunday given a directive to the management of the nearby Toronto Hospital to give proper medical attention to all the injured victims at the expense of the state government.

In another development, Chief Medical Director of Toronto Hospitals, Onitsha, Dr. Emeka Eze, has said that those victims admitted in the hospital following the incident are in stable condition, adding that the hospital had been able to cope with the large number of the victims.

He said: "As you can see, they are in good and stable condition; we have been putting in our best and one good thing working for us is

that the hospital got the necessary medication and equipment to attend emergencies."

According to him: "As I am speaking with you now, I am leaving the scene of the accident at Uppere Iweka after visiting Toronto and General Hospitals for St. Charles Borromeo Hospital for forensic tests on the victims. You know that if we don't get that test, it will be difficult to identify the corpses and that means if we do not succeed it will result to mass burial for the victims. There is a truth that 48 more people have died as a result of the accident."

He, however, cautioned unauthorised persons, especially mortuary attendants from giving out unauthorised information to members of the public. He also urged concerned citizens to source information from only reliable officials.