
Death toll rises to 23 as survivors recount ordeal of Lagos explosion

By Tope Templer Olaiya,
Odita Sunday and
Kehinde Olatunji

17 March 2020 | 3:55
am



The toddler rescued on Sunday night

- **Three-year-old girl rescued from debris after about 12 hours • ‘Run for safety’, last words of heroic school principal, Rev. Sis Alokha**
- **Bethlehem Girls College staff quarters, administrative building, refectory, hostel buildings leveled to the ground, says Archbishop**
- **Many besiege site in search of missing relatives as street urchins defy police presence to loot**

A day after the horrific explosions at Abule Ado community of Lagos State, it still feels like a vile horror movie from a cinema, from which the nasty sensation of dread would wear off soon.

The Lagos State governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, visited the scene of the explosion yesterday morning and his only fitting description of the situation was: “It is like a war zone. I will confess that I have never seen anything of this magnitude before.”

Biden scores big wins in Florida, Illinois on virus-hit primary night

6 hours ago

Pictures do not convey the grief of those who lost loved ones, or the anxiety of those still searching. Seven more bodies were recovered from the rubbles of Sunday's explosion. This brings the number of death recorded so far to 23. Most of the injured persons have been admitted at the Nigerian Navy Reference Hospital, Navy Town, Ojo, receiving treatment. Two yet to be identified bodies were recovered by the rescue officials at the scene of explosion. The bodies were found under the rubbles of the collapsed school building at about 11:00a.m. on Monday morning.

From the rubbles of the devastation came cheering news yesterday. A child identified simply as Favour was rescued from the rubbles of one of the collapsed building at Abule Ado. The three-year-old girl was rescued on Sunday night by operatives of the Red Cross Nigeria.

Chairman, Red Cross Nigeria, Adebowale Kolawole, told newsmen: "We recovered her naked under the debris of a building. Later, we found out that the mother and her sibling were admitted into the hospital. The mother had sustained a head injury and was in a semi-conscious state at the time she was rescued earlier on Sunday morning.

"This morning when she asked for her daughter, the doctors told her that her daughter is safe and with the Red Cross. Actually, that was what we wanted to achieve, so that the mother would be at rest psychologically and not add to the pains the mother is going through. As soon as possible, we are taking her to go see her mother at the Naval hospital. She is favour and God has favoured her."

It was not the case for the Udoakonobis, a young couple who fate served a cruel hand. Chisom Udoakonobi, a First Class Accounting graduate and her husband, Emmanuel, lost their lives to the explosion. They were sadly expecting a baby.

Friend of the deceased, Kerry Chukwuma, said: "The husband was a good friend of mine. They went to church that morning for the first service. Got home few minutes before the explosion. If not that Emma's mum went to the second service, who knows? I am pained.

"Emma was the only son. He jokes a lot and was very hardworking. Chisom graduated with first class in accounting, was also the only daughter of her parents too. So sad young promising lives were wasted just like that. They were a very promising and loving couple. May their souls rest in peace."

The Catholic Archbishop of Lagos Archdiocese, Most Rev. Alfred Adewale Martins, yesterday on behalf of the proprietors of the Bethlehem Girls College, Abule Ado, confirmed the death of the school's administrator, Rev. Sister (Dr.) Henrietta Alokha SSH in Sunday's devastating explosion in Amuwo-Odofin Local Government Area of Lagos.

Lamenting the massive explosion which rocked Abule Ado Area while the Bethlehem Girls College (owned by the Catholic Church) community were in church, the Archbishop said apart from the Administrator, an unnamed female security guard died in the process of taking care that the students were safe.

The statement personally signed by Martins reads: "We do not have a duly investigated explanation for the explosion yet. All we know is that a truck accident was involved, the

pipeline going through the community was involved as well as a stack of gas cylinders. All these together by some series of cause and effect are said to be the cause of the devastating explosion, which very badly affected our Bethlehem Girls College, as well as many other buildings in the vicinity.

“This sad incident occurred while the students and staff were at Sunday Mass. With the help of the first respondents, all the students were rescued and some that were injured were rushed to the hospitals. The other students have been released to their parents and gone to their different homes. We want to state that all students in the school were reported safe.

“Those who sustained injuries were promptly attended to in various hospitals within the environs. We are getting our Education Department along with the Administrators of other Archdiocesan schools to see how the students of Bethlehem Girls College can be accommodated in the other schools so that their education is not disrupted.

“Unfortunately, the Administrator of the school, Rev. Sr. Dr. Henrietta Alokha SSH and one female security guard died in the process of taking care that the students were safe. Alokha and the other worker that died have paid the supreme price in their bid to lead all her students to safety. May their souls rest in peace. It is important to confirm that no priest died during the incident. The priest who was celebrating the Mass helped in rescuing the students and he himself is safe,” the archbishop stated.

Unfortunately, Martins said the institution’s staff quarters, administrative building, the refectory and hostel buildings were leveled to the ground as a result of the impact of the explosion with no essential building standing except the convent housing the nuns in charge of the school.

On that Black Sunday, residents of Abule Ado community had started the day with great expectations like every other Sunday. Many worshippers were already in the church and others were either making preparation or on their way before the explosion changed the day that started well and has put them on the nation’s map with dignitaries visiting in turns to see firsthand the yet-to-be-explained devastation.

The students of Bethlehem girls boarding school had finished their morning mass and were heading to the school dining hall for their breakfast, while the school principal was attending to other matters in her office when the explosion occurred. In the confusion that ensued, the students were running around as the explosion came with wanton destruction blowing off the roof of most of the buildings within the school premises and sending dust and debris flying everywhere.

Like a mother hen protecting her chicks, Rev. Sis Alokha ran straight to the dining hall where some students was trapped, without any protective gear, she dived into the rubbles and began to pull out students not minding her own safety.

As she pulled through the rubbles of bricks, shattered windows, iron, and wood, all she was shouting to the students was: ‘Run for safety’. Before she could get herself out of the partially collapsed building, the half-blown roof fell on her and killed her instantly.

The principal was indeed a heroine, who gave her life to ensure the safety of her students. She exhibited the uncommon selfless courage of the late Dr. Stella Ameyo

NYSC shuts down orientation camps over coronavirus fears

5 hours ago

Adadevoh, who put her own life on the line so that Ebola would not ravage Nigerians. Alokha couldn't make it out alive. She died saving over 300 students.

Clement Okitikpi, a journalist, said: "By her calling she could not and did not have a biological child and did what some mothers would not do to save the live of their child. She could have stood from a safe distance wailing for help to rescue the students. She went into the inferno many times like a firefighter rescuing the children she truly loved and in the process lost her own. She took the oath of service to humanity, practiced it and died doing it.

This selfless woman deserves a national honour.

"The reason why citizens of great nations willingly give their lives in service to their nation is because those societies recognise ordinary people who do extraordinary things. Rest in Peace, Rev Sis Henrietta Alokha, SSH and may good Nigerians continue to remember your sacrifice and good deeds."

It was gathered that one of the victims, a lady, was still alive as at the time she was brought out from the debris. This is even as parents and relations kept trooping to the scene to look for their children and loved ones.

The Public Relations Officer of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) of the South-West Region, Ibrahim Farinloye, said three bodies were recovered, while a child was rescued.

Michael Abiye, a distraught man, said he was still looking for his cousin who stays with him. According to Abiye: "My cousin came two months ago and told me he worships in one of the Pentecostal churches in the area, but I don't know the particular church. Since the explosion occurred, I have not seen him and his phone is switched off. I have gone to all the hospitals, including naval hospital, Ojo, but I couldn't find him. I learnt that five more bodies were recovered today, but there is no information on where they took the bodies to," he said.

As at press time, police operatives and emergency workers have cordoned off the area. A police officer said the area was cordoned off to prevent street urchins from cashing in on the opportunity provided to loot victims' properties.

However, street urchins still defied police presence to steal electric sets under the pretence of helping victims to move their household equipment to a safe ground. Some people were also seen parking out en-mass from the area for fear of the likelihood of another explosion.

John Okon, said that he was parking out of the area because he believes they are sitting on a keg of gunpowder. "As a trader at Tradefair Complex, I moved into the area five years ago because of its proximity to my business place.

"However, I started entertaining fear when news of how vandals were destroying pipelines to scoop for fuel were rife. At times, the air would be filled with tick odour of petrol from the oil spillage. I am happy that I am moving out of the area with my family intact. Some people are still looking for their children," he said.

CNN Philippines goes off-air in coronavirus scare

2 hours ago

A woman, Kemi Kolaosho, said she rushed to the area when she heard of the explosion yesterday in search for her daughter. She said she could not get any information about the whereabouts of the students, but was later told that they were moved to one of the Catholic churches in either Navy town or Satellite town.

She said: “We were told that management of the school would address parents later today. But up till now we are yet to hear from them. At about 10:00a.m. someone came to tell us that the students have being relocated from the area owing to the damage done to the school building,” she added.

She added that she heard that about 40 students of Bethlehem Girl’s High School, Ojo were rushed Navy hospital Ojo.

Meanwhile, the Lagos State Police Public Relations Officer, Bala Elkana, said a combined team of mobile and regular policemen have been deployed to provide adequate security in the area. Also, the Command Information Officer, Western Naval Command, Navy Commander Thomas Otuji, said that a total of 55 people were rushed to the Nigerian Navy Reference Hospital, Ojo, by rescuers led by the Flag Officer Commanding (FOC) Western Naval Command.

He said that the hospital also received and attended to casualties from the explosion site besides the 55 persons the navy’s medical team took to the hospital. “Those brought to the hospital are made up of 36 school pupils and 19 adults. One of the adults had about 35 per cent mixed degree burns with inhalation injuries and pulmonary edema. He has been admitted into the Intensive Care Unit and connected to a ventilator.

“Seven other adults and two children are on admission in the wards. Two adults had Traumatic Brain Injury and were referred to Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) for neurosurgical intervention. The remaining 43 have been treated and discharged. Three persons were brought in dead, two females and a male.

In this article:

Adebawale Kolawole

Babajide Sanwo-Olu

Lagos explosion



Receive News Alerts on Whatsapp: [+2348136370421](https://wa.me/2348136370421)

No comments yet