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Three die, 35 rescued in FCT building collapse

From Asimazi Momoh Jimoh, Olati Sunday, Cornelius Esson and Tina Abeku, Abuja

THREE persons were yesterday confirmed dead, while 35 were rescued when a two-storey building collapsed along Lagos Street, by Nsukka Street junction, Garki village, Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

The Guardian learnt that the incident occurred in the early hours of Thursday.

According to government officials undertaking rescue operations at the venue, the building came down on unsuspecting residents shortly after midnight while it was raining, killing two at the venue while one later died in the hospital.

An eyewitness, Tanko Dabo, told newsmen at the scene, that the building was housing many apartments, while the ground floor had a lot of shops.

"There was wailing all over the place after the building collapsed. Dozens of people were either dead or trapped, as the building was fully occupied."

"It was a scene of helplessness with people screaming and running helter-skelter, while the heavy rain continued," he said.

A survivor, Gift Eze, said she escaped with only the clothes on her body.

She called on the government to provide immediate relief and support for them. She said: "I escaped with only the clothes on me, the house, property, everything is gone,

• I escaped with only these clothes on me, says survivor

• Wike orders arrest of landlord, says incident vindicates resolve to demolish illegal structures

please we need immediate help. Where do we sleep tonight and where do we live?"

Some residents of the area, who spoke to The Guardian, said they have persistently complained to the landlord and lawyer of the collapsed building concerning its dilapidated state.

They said their complaints, however, fell on deaf ears.

The visibly angry residents also blamed relevant government agencies for failing to conduct integrity tests or inspection of the building.

Meanwhile, the FCT Minister, Nyesom Wike, has ordered the immediate arrest of the landlord of the two-storey building, but the landlord is said to be on the run.

Wike gave the order when he visited the scene of the incident, saying enough is enough for individuals building without approved building plans, and use of substandard materials.

"We will identify and arrest the owners of the building," he said.

The minister assured that the government will take care of the hospital bill and treatment of those rescued and are receiving treatment for various degrees of injuries in hospitals.

He said: "It's unfortunate that we woke this morning to the very disturbing news of this building collapse. It is not what we contemplated. Let



Scene of the incident yesterday

PHOTO: TINA ABEKU

me thank the rescue agencies, particularly National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and Federal Environmental Management Agency (FEMA) that had supported us to rescue not less than 32 lives. "I will appeal to the Permanent Secretary to make sure that funds are raised to pay the hospital bills of those who were rescued, so that we don't lose any more persons, and this should be done immediately."

The senator representing the FCT, Senator Ireti Kingibe, who arrived at the

venue shortly after the departure of the FCT minister, decried the spate of building collapse in the FCT and attendant loss of life and property.

She tasked regulatory bodies to conduct periodic checks on buildings across the FCT to avoid a repeat of the incident.

Kingibe said although the area is a local Gbagyi setting, it is important to follow standards when setting up any building structure to avoid building collapse.

Officials of the FCT Develop-

ment Control, FCT FERMA and the Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON), among others, all agreed that the about 30 year-old building was already distressed, and therefore no longer fit for people to live in.

District Head, Garki, Stephen Yakubu, explained that the owner of the building had already given the occupants quit notice for a while because the building had already depreciated and is almost collapsing. However, some of the occupants still stayed back for lack of where

to immediately move to, and were unfortunately caught up in the disaster.

He said: "Based on the information we were told, the owner had already given them quite notice when he realised that the building was depreciating and it was almost collapsing, but for over two months now, they have refused to leave, perhaps the reason could be that they didn't have accommodation anywhere."

"We are deeply saddened over the loss of lives there. Nobody is happy because of losing a life, even if it is a baby, it is something that is quite worrisome. We are working with the authorities to prevent this from happening again," he said.

Also, FCT Police spokesperson, Josephine Adeh, said the Command swiftly responded to the emergency, dispatching specialised search and rescue teams to the scene to save lives and ensure the safety of all those affected.

"The Command has deployed every effort to locate and extricate those who are trapped. We are working in close coordination with other relevant agencies, including the Fire Service, Emergency Medical Services, and disaster response teams to streamline our rescue efforts."

"The Commissioner of Police (CP) Haruna G. Garba, personally visited the site to assess the situation and to extend condolences to the affected families."