

SundayNews

Ibori:

Confiscation case collapsed for lack of evidence

— Aondoakaa

By Austin Oboh (Lagos) and Tor Vande-Acka (Makurdi)

FORMER Attorney General of the Federation (AGF) and Minister of Justice, Michael Aondoakaa, has explained the reason why the assets confiscation trial of former governor of Delta State, James Ibori, recently failed in London, saying the prosecution could not tender evidences to prosecute him.

In the same vein, he ridiculed claims that he jointly opened an account with the former governor in South Africa, and stated that he had never visited that country and could not have opened a bank account there.

While fielding questions from Journalists in Makurdi, Aondoakaa who served in the government of late Umaru Yar'Adua, also defended his insistence that the trial of the former governor should adhere to the rule of law.

Hear him: "If I had any account anywhere in the world, by now it should have been out.

"The allegation they brought up which was funny and laughable was that I have an account in South Africa, jointly, with James Ibori.

"As I am talking to you, throughout my life, I have never visited South Africa and I challenge anybody in the world.

"I wrote the Metropolitan Police, it was a very laughable experience for you to say I have a bank account of £40 million pounds in a country I have never visited.

"It is not possible to have an account without you being there, because all over the world they must have your biometric data. So, how?

"But as I am sitting here, since I was born I have never visited South Africa. So these were some of the lies that were flying about as at that

Tragedy in Anambra: 27 die in church stampede

By Okey Maduforo (Awka) and Chukwujekwu Ilozue (Onitsha)

TRAGEDY struck Saturday morning at Uke Town in Idemili North Local Government Area of Anambra State when over 150 worshippers at a night prayer mysteriously collapsed shortly after the vigil, leaving over 27 persons dead in the process.

At the Immaculate Heart Hospital at Nkpor, over 17 persons were confirmed dead while nine were also confirmed dead at Boromew and another three persons whose whereabouts were unknown as at the time of filing this report. The rest were reported to have been kept at other hospitals in Onitsha.

An eye witness said it that the session at Holy Ghost Adoration Ministry being run by Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Obimma had commenced prayers when he announced the presence of Governor Peter Obi and the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) candidate, Chief Willie Obiano, and urged the congregation to allow him address the gathering.

But the congregation refused, shouting "No! No!" and singing praise songs in favour of All Progressives Congress (APC) governorship candidate, Sen. Chris Ngige, who hails from nearby town Alor in Idemili South Local Government Area.

Efforts to make the congregation see reasons proved abortive for several minutes until towards the end of the night vigil when the governor later addressed them and asked the priest to pray for him and Obiano which the priest did amidst chants of resistance by the congregation who insisted that they do not want Obiano and the governor.

Few minutes after the governor and Obiano had gone, the crowd began to disperse at about 5:14 am and the eye

witness narrated that one out of the major roads which the governor passed through while going had witnessed a large number of the congregation slumping and falling on top of the other and at the time of the incident more than 150 persons had collapsed.

According to another eye witness: "The last Friday all night prayer was the highest, I have not seen the type of crowd I saw on Friday since the history of this ministry; maybe because it was All Saints' Day which Catholics regard as an holiday of obligation, and so many people didn't open their shops and that was why the crowd was much.

"So it is possible that the cause of these deaths was stampede and exhaustion which occurred when people started struggling to find their way and a stampede ensued. So these people that died might have died under such circumstance," he said.

Emeka Iloidiuba, who lost his wife, spoke to our reporter amidst tears when he said they had come out of the prayer ground on their way through the crowded place to where they parked their vehicle when suddenly there was shouting everywhere and people started scampering for safety when his wife fell down and never got up.

"I'm from Nnokwa in Idemili South council area of Anambra State, I came to Ebube Muonso with my wife, when the prayer ended around 5:30 am, we stood up to find our way home, then the governor and his entourage had left but when we got to the entrance, there was unprecedented crowd trying to find their way out of the prayer ground, the crowd surged forward and that was when my wife fell down and people fell on top of her till she died," he said.

They were rushed to Immaculate Heart and Beoro-

meo hospitals in Nkpor and Onitsha respectively and were attended to. While some later regained consciousness, over 27 gave up the ghost as a result of the incident.

Based on information from some members of the public, the two Deputy Inspector-Generals (DIGs) of Police on official duty in Awka, Philemon Leha and Kachi Udorji, visited the area, describing it as tragic. They added that the incident cannot be seen as a plot to kill people at the ministry.

Udorji, who is DIG in charge of C Department, led other top police officers to the prayer ground and later to Crown Hospital. He expressed shock over the incident and said investigations would continue so as to unravel the cause of the incident.

Udorji, who later took other top officers including other DIGs and AIGs to the Onitsha Area Command, confirmed the figure of the casualties and urged the police officers to work hard to get to the root of the incident.

However, there is confusion on the cause of the incident as it is being alleged that a large snake had visited the arena, disturbing the prayer session and none of the members of the congregation at the vigil would say exactly the whereabouts of the snake which was said to have disappeared mysteriously.

Deepening the confusion further is the rivalry between the APC and APGA in the state which was alleged to have been played out within the Uke Community as it was gathered that Sen.

Opponents of APGA however alleged that there may have been some spiritual angle to the incident which, according to them, occurred shortly after the governor had left. Ngige was said to be the early caller that visited the scene of the incident.

Obi was said to have cancelled all his engagements

including campaign flag-off at Nsugbe, Live Radio programme, Flag-off of road projects, inspection of the on-going shopping Mall at Onitsha and the on-going Stadium at Awka, to visit the Adoration Ground with security agencies, who he informed of the incident immediately he got the report.

The DIGs commended Obi's quick response and described the cancelling of all the events as a great sign of responsiveness and care for the people. Efforts to reach the Spiritual Director of the Centre proved abortive, as he was said to have gone to brief his Local Ordinary, Archbishop Valerian Okeke, about the incident; but Obi was received by the Coordinator of the Centre, Brother Achebe Nnadi. He said it was most confusing while a group of people should start shouting fire when there was none.

From the adoration ground, Obi visited the Crown Hospital, Nkpor to see the wounded, most of who have left and he directed the names of all the wounded to be compiled for him. Though he refused to disclose the reason, it is believed that the state will take care of their hospital bill.

Obi also visited Immaculate Heart Hospital, Nkpor, where he directed the names of those hospitalised to be compiled; then St Charles Borromeo hospital. At the hospital, the spiritual Director of the Ministry, Fr. Emmanuel Obinma, came around. He was also visiting the wounded at different hospitals. He said he was still in shock to talk to the press. Meanwhile, the governor said that a Panel of Enquiry would be set up immediately to ascertain the immediate and remote causes of the incident.

Meanwhile, the police in Anambra has commenced investigations into the cause of death of victims of the incident.

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The Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) for the command, DSP Emeka Chukwuemeka, made the disclosure on Saturday in Uke.

He said the incident occurred at the prayer ground in the early hours of Saturday.

"The number of deaths cannot be ascertained now until we conclude investigations because some persons who fainted were later resuscitated," he said.

Meanwhile, Ngige Campaign Organisation has blamed governor Obi and his entourage for the stampede that led to the death of some members of the church.

In a statement signed by Mr. Igboeli Arinze on behalf of the organization, the campaign said the incident was clearly avoidable if the security aides of the governor had conducted themselves in orderly manner.

The statement further reads: "We have it as empirical evidence that when the Governor came to the adoration grounds, he began to campaign for his candidate, Mr. Willie Obiano, this largely irked the congregants who began to gently protest that the adoration ground was a place of prayer and not politics.

"In the course of the governor leaving the premises of the prayer ground, the governor's security agents in their overzealousness began to manhandle the crowd all in the name of wanting to secure their principal, this we hear was actually what caused the stampede."

"We regret that such a situation could have been avoided if the APGA campaign team did not visit the adoration ground at that ungodly hour to campaign for votes. We urge the APGA campaign team to see the house of God as a place of prayer and not a place to play politics."

No tangible discussion yet with APC, says nPDP

By Rotimi Akinwumi (Abuja)