

## NEWS

# Two dead in Tejuosho market fire



• Sympathisers besiege the burnt Tejuosho, Lagos market on Tuesday



• Traders evacuating the remains of their wares



• One of the traders bemoaning her fate



• Another trader who lost most of her goods

**I**t was double tragedy at the popular Tejuosho market, Yaba, Lagos Mainland yesterday. Two men, battling to put out a late evening inferno which gutted the market were killed.

Traders who had closed on Tuesday evening after the day's job lost their wares to the fire which took hours to put out.

Governor Babatunde Fashola, who was at the market yesterday, expressed shock and ordered its immediate closure.

A failed rescue mission to contain the fire caused the death of the two men said to have been trapped in the market.

The duo, whose identities remained unknown yesterday, and an official of the State Fire Service were trapped as they strove to curtail the inferno, described as the worst in the market's history, from spreading to other sections.

The fire man has been rescued while the remaining two have not been found, even as the traders, yesterday counted their losses.

A trader, simply identified as Emeka sat on a burnt table.

"I no know how I go start again oo," was all he muttered as friends and sympathisers tried without success to console him.

"Every time na im dis market dey burn, everytime."

He watched as smoke and smoldering ash billowed from what was once his only source of livelihood.

Goods worth several million of naira were lost.



• Governor Fashola (second right), Mr Afolabi Kofo-Abayomi, Special Adviser to the governor (left), Mrs Adetoun Adeniran, former Lagos Deputy Speaker (left) and Dr. Oke Osanyintolu, General Manager, Lagos State Environmental Management Authority (LASEMA) during the inspection of the market

By Dele Adeyanju

Some people believed the inferno was caused by an electrical fault in a section of the market known as Canteen.

The fire, *The Nation* learnt started at about 7:30pm in the canteen section of the market after most traders had closed for the day.

Few people were inside the market when the fire started.

None could, however, do anything to prevent the fire from spreading because of its sheer intensity.

Some who made initial attempts to check it failed.

*The Nation* watched as sev-

eral traders and sympathisers tried to clear the debris, while several others watched speechless.

They were yet to come to terms with the magnitude of their losses.

Most of the affected shop-owners had travelled for the yuletide, making identification of wares almost impossible.

Market officials were however unavailable for comment, at the time of this report.

Several people expressed displeasure at the slow response to distress call by fire fighters. Ojuelegba fire sta-

tion, few minutes drive from the scene could have checked the inferno, some people said.

A resident, who gave his name as Isiaka Oyetunde, said it smacked of irresponsibility and outright negligence on the part of the Fire men, whose office is located close to the area, but still failed to show up.

"We do not know what they are paid for if they can not come at a time when they are mostly needed."

"Several people even went to their office to alert them immediately it (the fire) started but they did not show

up," he alleged.

There was also widespread discontent that the police failed to rein in the Area Boys or street urchins, who were on the loose and prevented genuine residents from taming the fire. The development fuelled suspicion that some yet to be identified persons are behind the incident for reasons best known to them.

The social miscreants, rather than salvage wares, took undue advantage of the incident to break into shops to loot.

"How can people be looting those who have lost so much already and the police

can not apprehend them," he fumed.

Akeem Bello, the media aide to Governor Raji Fashola, however, praised the fire fighters for rising to the occasion.

Fashola yesterday expressed sadness over the fire which occurred at the Tejuosho Market. He ordered and directed the immediate closure of the market.

The governor said the market would not be reopened until his administration was satisfied that the structures are fit for commercial activities.

Fashola, also directed the pulling down of the market even as he appealed to the traders to vacate the area as the Police have been directed to take charge of the area.

He explained that heavy duty equipment already deployed to the site could only move in and rescue those who might have been trapped including a personnel of the State Fire Service only when the traders have vacated the market.

He said the structure of the market had weakened as it was constructed over 30 years ago, saying the state government would rebuild the market into a model market befitting the status of the area.

Fashola said the state government might acquire some properties around the market in order to ensure that the state builds a ultra-modern market that will accommodate all the traders in the area.

PHOTOS: TUNED OGUNDEJI