

11 dead in Lagos building collapse

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ELEVEN persons were yesterday confirmed dead in Tuesday's building collapse in Lagos. Two casualties had been reported yesterday.

State Police Command spokesman Frank Mba, a Superintendent, said the bodies had been deposited in a morgue.

Reacting to the incident, the government said it would acquire the building - in line with the physical planning law and regulation.

The scene remained chaotic yesterday amid desperate efforts to bring out those trapped in the building.

Parents joined the rescue efforts in search of their children.

Many children, who had just returned from school when the building collapsed, are believed to be trapped in the rubble.

Heavy duty vehicles were at work yesterday, clearing the debris to enable the rescuers reach those trapped.

Continued on page 2

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Continued from page 1

At 1.20p.m., some of the rescuers stopped a caterpillar, shouting, "There is a little girl here! There is a little girl here!!"

All those looking for their loved ones surged forward to identify the body.

It was that of a 12-year old girl, who was later identified as Ada.

She was wearing only her under-pant. Her parents, friends and relatives wept.

As her body was taken away by the Red Cross and the Lagos State Ambulance Service, her father said: "I told you that if she is found, she will be found naked. I was told that she went into the house to pull off her school uniform when the building collapsed. So this is the end. O! Ada."

Ada was the 11th victim brought out from the debris.

Before her was a five year old boy, who was still in his school uniform.

There was also a young man Kelechi Ugorji, who was searching for his sister and her four-year-old son.

Ugorji told *The Nation* that he spoke with his sister Joy around 4:30pm and precisely one hour later, her sister's friend called to inform him of what had happened.

He said around 8pm on Tuesday, somebody called him with his sister's number to inform him that the owner of the phone was dead but that they had not been able to locate her body.

Said Ugorji: "When she called me in the afternoon, I told her I wanted to come to meet her at home but she asked me not to come. It was later in the day that I was told that their building had collapsed."

"We have been here since yesterday (Tuesday), hoping against hope that she and her son will be rescued, but up till now, there seems to be no hope."

"From here now, we will move round all the hospitals where victims were taken for treatment to see if we will find her body."

Thirty-eight persons, who were rescued, are in the General Hospital, Mushin, the Isolo General Hospital, and Aishat Specialist Hospital.

Chairman of Mushin Local Government Babatunde Adepitan said he felt sorry for the victims, promising to liaise with the government to see what could be done to assist them.

Adepitan said he had gone round to look at other buildings in the area. He spotted some houses in a terrible state and ordered them seal off.

Some of the houses sealed are 67, Onifade, 53 and 13, Ogungayji, 30, Mosalashi, 17, Takuro, 36, Agbor street. Owners of two houses on Wuraola and Ewuman streets were directed to renovate them.

Medical Director of Aishat Specialist Hospital Dr. Oladipo Ayantola told *The Nation* that since Tuesday evening when the incident occurred, more than 25 people had been

brought to the hospital.

He said most of them had major cuts on their heads and other parts of their bodies and would require intensive care.

In tears, Mr. Kenneth Aibangbee, who lost his mother, said the house had shown signs of distress five days ago when some pillars at the rear started shifting from their position.

He said his mother seemed to have a premonition of her death when she told him in the morning of the incident to look for a safer accommodation for the family. Aibangbee said his sister called him at about 4pm that his mother was trapped in the house while others made it to safety. His mother's remains, Aibangbee said, have been deposited in the mortuary.

He said he was grateful to God that his sister and daughter escaped unhurt.

Mrs. Ngozi Edogba, who lost her mother-in-law, Mrs. Rosemary Edogba (60), said the house was not fit for human habitation. She said she had severally suggested to his in-laws to find an alternative accommodation for their mother but regretted that they could not do so before the tragedy.

She told *The Nation* that her mother-in-law was in the toilet when the incident happened. The wall crushed her.

Mrs Edogba regretted that the landlord had just increased the rent from N36,000 to N48,000 per annum, despite the deficiencies in the building. He has refused to comply with entreaties from government to work on the house, she said.

Assistant National Coordinator (South-West) of National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) Abdulsalam Mohammed said rescue operations started about 5pm on Tuesday. He said though it had been hectic, it would have been worse if the incident had happened at night as many more casualties would have been recorded.

The Chairman of Nigerian Institute of Builders, Lagos State chapter, Mr Kunle Awobodu, said the house was reportedly a bungalow before it was raised to a four-storey building.

"Though we have not carried out our investigations, from what you can see here, you will know that the materials used in the construction of the house are substandard and the manpower employed was underpaid. We intend to find out whether it was a professional that was employed to do this job and, if not we will take action against the persons involved."

"People should learn how to hire professionals. We will also collaborate with all those involved in the construction of houses including the building material sellers, to ensure that the uses of substandard materials are checked," Awobodu said.

Commissioner for Information and Strategy Opeyemi Bamidele said it was in the public interest for the government to acquire the house.

The law, he said, would not be bent over this case.

He said: "We have not only done it to individuals but also to the Federal government that owned the Bank of Industry Building and if we have gone that far to implement the law, we wouldn't have any reason to bend the rules or shy away from implementing the same law that we apply to other people."

State's stand on reforms

Musa, who was Governor of Kaduna State, added: "We are finished; we cannot have true democracy at the grassroots. What is happening in most states is that governors pick those who should be local government chairmen and councillors."

"In some states during local government elections, we had cases where people were not allowed to vote. Do we still want this to continue?"

"By retaining SIECs, some people are asking for trouble because we won't have genuine democracy in place at the grassroots. The suffering of the people is too much and they should be able to effect changes

through the ballot. But with SIECs, how can you change anything peacefully through elections? We are stretching our luck too far; we should not take the electorate for granted."

Falana said: "The council's decisions are totally illegal. The Council has been established pursuant to Section 153 of the Constitution as an advisory body. To that extent its powers are circumscribed and limited to offering advice to the President of the republic on national census, INEC, law and order etc."

"The committee should be advised to desist from taking decisions and issuing directives which have no constitutional basis."

0% to \$1.2b monthly

rent and future demand projections."

On what was responsible for the situation, Barkindo said: "This industry, being the nerve centre of our economy and being more international than most industries, cannot be immune from the stress that the global economy is currently undergoing."

"The committees in the National Assembly should as a matter of urgency start looking not only on the current condition of the industry but on the impact of the turmoil of the international economy on our domestic economy and our industry in particular. You must be aware that this international turmoil is directly impacting on demand of hydrocarbon and energy in general as a result of the recessionary conditions in the countries of most of the emerging economy. The fact that our economy relies almost exclusively on earnings from the export of hydrocarbon to this

economies that are now in turmoil should figure an urgent reforms not only from the National Assembly but from all government."

"To drive this point home, throughout 2008, the NNPC and its joint venture companies have produced an average of 904,000 barrels a day, being our equity oil upon which the budget of the country is dependent at an average price of \$97 from January 2008 to December of 2008, meaning that cumulatively for the year 2008, we had realised from oil export alone, an estimated US\$32 billion providing to the federal account allocation committee on a monthly basis a whopping amount of about \$2.2 billion when you net out cash calls obligations that also averaged about US\$414 million."

The Chairman of the Senate Committee on Petroleum (Upstream), Senator Lee Maeba asked NNPC officials to improve on their community relations development activities.