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Pregnant woman, seven others die in fire explosion

By <u>Taiwo Abiodun</u> | Published 8/03/2010 | <u>News Extra</u> | Unrated

Tragedy struck penultimate Tuesday morning at about 1.00 am at Ile Baale Seunsun near Methodist Secondary School, Fiditi in Owo town, when a tanker fully-loaded with petroleum veered off the road, fell and spilled its contents which caught fire and razed three houses. A **pregnant woman**, due for delivery this month, with about six other occupants died in the incident.

According to eye witnesses, eight people were roasted in their sleep, while properties worth millions of naira were destroyed.

Koffi Mohammed, a Ghanaian whose **pregnant** wife, a Togolese, due for delivery this month, died in the inferno was in tears while narrating the sordid incident to Newsextra.

According to Mohammed, the alarm raised by another tenant that a petrol tanker had fallen in front of their house woke them up.

His words: "When I heard the cries of another tenant that a tanker trailer had fallen at the frontage of our house, I quickly carried our last child, Samuel, who is three years old and woke the rest up. I never knew they were not following me. I jumped over the high wall fence and my wife jumped through the lower fence but suddenly the tanker exploded and as my wife made effort to jump the small fence she fell and was trapped in the fire.

"She made effort to come out but could not, due to her big tummy and later we heard her screaming from the thick fire by the time she was rescued, she had been severely burnt. She was taken to the hospital and forced into delivery, she later died."

About the other three that died. Mohammed said "what was left of my daughter Maryam and Lekee's (a younger sister to my wife) were ashes," the Ghanaian said weeping.

Mohammed who has spent over 40 years in Nigeria said "my wife was nice. She is a Togolese and I am a Ghanaian. I am a labourer, where do I start from," he asked rhetorically. Now he has only Samuel left.

For Alhaja Ayisat Abdulai, the incident that Tuesday morning she told Newsextra was one she would rather not want to recall.

"We heard the sound *gbuam* and we all woke alarmed when we saw the balls of fire and thick smoke enveloping everywhere. I woke all the children up and I saw two of them already outside the house not knowing that it was not all the three that followed us as we ran for our dear life into the forest. I lost Daniel (15), Deborah (10) and Esther (18) in the fire. Now I have just only two children remaining. I am already 50 years old. Where will I start from? My husband is a trader and has gone to Kano. This is terrible," she lamented as she glanced at the ceiling confused.

While the families of Mohammed and Abdulai were not so lucky, two other tenants were lucky as they escaped with their families unhurt. Mrs Bukola Taiwo, mother of three was lucky as they were the first to hear the sound of the fallen tanker and raised the alarm. According to Bukola when she heard the sound, she woke up and alerted **others** to come out, "When we discovered it was a petrol tanker that fell and that the petrol was already spilling on the road and rushing towards the house, we quickly alerted **others** and took the backyard toilet exit to escape. We did not pick a pin. I am happy that Ruth, Elijah and Deborah with my husband escaped. We are still surprised, how the fire broke out. There was no electricity and we did not have light and we did not light the candle." On what they lost, the husband, Taiwo, said: "I lost my properties worth millions of naira."

The couple chorused "We were in our night dresses while the children had only their pants on. That is all our earthly possessions for now."

Another couple who escaped from the inferno, Mr and Mrs Femi Folasade Mulero described the incident as tragic. "I have nothing to say. I only know that we heard cries and we escaped. It was midnight, no help came."

Now all the affected occupants are living in their pastor's house at Ile Alao Ebenezer in Fiditi.

When Newsextra visited the scene of the incident, the remains of the petrol tanker was seen with the tell tales of the destruction all around. Everything on sight was burnt while the stream that passed through the back of the building had turned black as a result of the black ashes that floated on the water.

What remained of the dead had since been buried.

Pastor Segun and his wife, Mrs Bunmi Folaranmi of Love Foundation Bible Ministry who sheltered the victims called on public spirited individuals and the Oyo state Governor Otunba Adebayo Alao-Akala to come to the victim's aid.

"They are now naked, they have lost their children and wife, and they have lost their property. I am pleading for Nigerians to come up and help these victims," the couple pleaded.

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Madam Elizabeth Christopher described the incident as gory. "I can't believe my eyes; this is too much for a family to lose a **pregnant** wife and three kinsmen, and another lost three children at a go. It is sad". The driver of the tanker was said to have ran away moments after the accident.

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