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I'm finished, says man who lost wife, four children

Posted by: Mike Odiegwu in News 1 day ago 1 Comment

Why? Oh God why me? This has been the lamentation of Celestine Onwuliri, who lost five members of his family, including his wife, Magdalene, on May 29.

Onwuliri's wife and four of his children, including his first son, died in their sleep after inhaling generator fumes.

The 48-year old contract worker in a bank is yet to recover from the incident.

The distraught Onwuliri continuously peered into the sky with his arms folded across his chest when our reporter met with him in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

He again muttered: "Why?". He shook his head many times.

Onwuliri wondered why he had to bury his first son, Emmanuel, 13, his nine-year-old daughter, Blessing, and his four-year old twins, Mike and Mark, on the same day.

The body of his 35-year old wife, who he married 14 years ago, is still in the mortuary.

Onwuliri sometimes blamed himself for not being around when the incident happened.

He was in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, working when he was hit by the nasty blow.

The widower rued his transfer from Yenagoa to Port Harcourt by the bank where he worked on contractual basis as a technician.

"If not for the transfer, I would have been around my family and would have prevented the disaster. I don't know whether I will be able to survive the disaster.

"How do I survive without my wife of 14 years?"

He recalled the last conversation he had with his late wife.

Onwuliri said: "On the night of May 28, I was discussing an issue with her on phone around 10pm, but due to bad network, we said we would talk in the morning, I never knew that was the last conversation I was to have with my wife.

"The following morning, I called again around 6am as we agreed. I called her five times but she did not pick. I then called my first son, his phone also rang severally, he did not pick.

"I felt they may be having devotion, so I decided to wait for some time. I called again, but still nobody picked. I decided to call my neighbours and asked them to go and help me check what was wrong.

"My neighbours called me back to say they have knocked and checked but did not see or hear anybody. I then told them to break the window to know what was wrong.

"I was still on phone when I heard a shout from my neighbours. It was then it became clear to me that something terrible has happened.

"I was told to come immediately to Yenagoa, but I never thought of generator fumes.

"All the seven persons in my house were taken to the Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Yenagoa. I went straight to meet them," he said.

But only his 12-year old second son, Chris, and a relative, Chidera Opara, survived but they are in critical condition.

Members of the family inhaled the carbon monoxide fumes from a generator that emanated from a room next to their bedroom.

The incident occurred at a time Yenagoa experienced a three-week power outage after thunderstorms destroyed major power transmission equipment.

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He lamented the lack of oxygen in the hospital and said his twins would have survived.

"When my neighbours came to FMC, Yenagoa, with my family, the health personnel said there was no oxygen to revive my children. The neighbours said the twins were still breathing.

"Assuming there was the needed equipment, the story wouldn't have ended this way. I have to battle to save my second son and my in-law's daughter," he said.

Onwuliri also grappled with erratic power supply in the hospital. He was compelled to buy fuel to power the generator in the hospital from midnight till the next morning.

"The FMC starts its generator from 7pm till midnight, from that midnight, I will buy fuel that will serve till morning.

"I am still talking to you because of help from friends, co-workers and other individuals.

"I have buried the children and have also transferred my wife's body to a hospital in my state, Imo, where she will be buried on July 20.

"I have also relocated the two survivors to the Federal Medical Centre, Owerri.

"I only came briefly to Yenagoa to see whether I could get help from the government. Right now I don't have money any more.

"The condition of my second son is still worrisome. He is talking but his head is not yet normal. I am told I should take him to a specialist to examine his brain. I had to leave FMC, Yenagoa in search of such specialist in FMC, Owerri.

"The girl on her own is not even better; she is only breathing but has not opened her mouth or eyes. The burden is too much for me.

"I plead with the government to help me. My wife's body is still in the mortuary. I have spent almost all I have, and don't know if I still have enough strength to carry on."

The Senior Special Adviser to the Governor on Non-Indigenes, Anayo Edwin, said he would meet with Governor Seriake Dickson on the issue.

He said he has also been speaking to individuals and groups, including Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo, to assist Onwuliri.

"I have been living in my own little way. This is one situation you won't wish your enemy," he said.

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Adesoji E. A.
June 27, 2013 at 11:29 pm

The Lord shall give the widower the fortitude to bear this great loss.

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