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RUBBLE OF THE COLLAPSED BUILDING AT SYNAGOGUE CHURCH OF ALL NATIONS IN LAGOS ON SATURDAY. Photo NAN

Synagogue toll rises to 115

Posted by: Our Reporter in Featured, News ⌚ 12 hours ago

• Injured victims flown home

South Africans raised yesterday their death toll in the September 12 guest house collapse at the Synagogue of All Nations (SCOAN) in Ikotun on the outskirts of Lagos to 115, up from 67 that was initially announced.

Twenty-five injured nationals receiving treatment in Lagos hospitals were yesterday flown back home. The C130 plane carrying them landed at the Swartkop Air Force base in Pretoria at 10.42 am local time.

Three children, including an 18-month-old and a two-year-old – both of who had lost their parents in the collapsed building – were among the injured flown in.

It is believed that there were no fewer than 349 visiting South Africans in the church at the time of the collapse; 17 were declared unaccounted for. It is not clear if they are among the new list of the dead announced yesterday by South African Government Minister Jeff Radebe.

The minister urged Nigeria to investigate the "tragedy".

South Africans are angry at what they see as the Nigerian government dragging its feet on launching an investigation into the collapse, which occurred when three storeys were being added to the two-storey building, and for not reacting more quickly to help those trapped under the rubble.

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) gave the final death toll at 90; 131 survived.

President Goodluck Jonathan visited the site on Saturday, offering his condolences to Church overseer Pastor T.B. Joshua, who has been the focus of South Africans' anger after he described the victims as "martyrs of faith" on his Facebook page.

Joshua and his supporters described the collapse as an "attack" somehow linked to a mysterious aircraft they claimed flew over the building before it collapsed.

Radebe spent much of his news conference congratulating the work of South African emergency workers for the "biggest evacuation by the air force since the dawn of democracy".

He did not mention the efforts of Nigerian emergency services or the church but said Nigeria was carrying out an investigation, although Jonathan has not announced any probe.

"We are keenly awaiting as a South African government the investigation that is being conducted by the Nigerian government so that we get to the bottom of the cause of ... this national disaster," Radebe said.

South Africa's media has been scathing of Joshua and the Nigerian government, especially after the Nigerian emergency services said the church had failed to cooperate and had blocked rescuers' access to the site.

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"Blood on their hands" was the front page headline of South Africa's Sunday Times. Many Nigerians have also been critical.

There was heavy police presence at the Swartkop base when the plane carrying the injured arrived.

Military personnel swiftly attended to them.

Shortly after the C130 SA Air Force plane landed at the Swartkop Air Force Base in Pretoria, an initial batch of the patients was whisked off to the hospital.

Most of the patients were brought out of the plane on stretchers and taken to ambulances parked nearby.

A woman in a red dress, supported by two soldiers, limped to one of the ambulances.

Others could also walk to the ambulances, with assistance.

A convoy of Tshwane metro police officers on motorbikes and SA Police Service vehicles escorted the first two ambulances from the military base shortly after 11am.

Members of a government inter-ministerial task force, led by Presidency Minister Jeff Radebe, approached the plane carrying the 26 injured South Africans after it landed.

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