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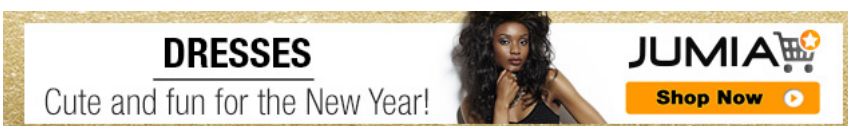
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Christmas Day tragedies: 11 die in fire, auto crashes in Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa

Posted by: Shola O'NEIL, S'South Regional Editor, Port Harcourt and Mike ODIEGWU, Yenagoe in [Featured](#), [News](#)
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No fewer than 11 people were feared dead in different Christmas day tragedies involving fire and auto accidents in Delta, Rivers and Bayelsa states.

Three persons were burnt to death when fire gutted a hotel located near the popular Jigbale Market around Orhumwonrun roundabout in Udu, Delta State.

More than 20 shops and other property worth millions of naira were destroyed in the inferno, which also ravaged a residential building located near the hotel, which is said to be used mostly by sex hawkers and itinerant traders.

It was gathered that the fire started at about 11:45 pm probably from an electrical connection in the red light facility, killing a couple and a young man in two separate rooms.

When our reporter visited the scene, hundreds of traders and other victims of the disaster were seen milling around the burnt down shops; they were wailing and weeping over their losses.

An eyewitness, Ms Tonia Semali, said: "The fire started at about midnight. Nobody knows what caused it; but the shop owners who rushed down could barely rescue any of their wares."

Our reporter, who visited the scene on Boxing Day afternoon, reported that the three charred remains of the victims were removed by health officials from Udu LG council at about 1 pm.

The bodies were scooped into three jute bags and evacuated from the scene in a Toyota Hiace bus painted

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in the official blue/white colours of the state’s taxis and buses.

A council official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, confirmed that the victims were burnt beyond recognition, adding, “in normal circumstances, we would need DNA tests to ascertain their identities because, as you can see, there is nothing to see from the mass of ash and burnt skulls.”

Auto crash claims two

In another tragedy, no fewer than two persons were confirmed dead in a fatal auto accident which occurred between Mbiama and Okogbe communities of Ahoada West area of the East/West highway in the afternoon of Christmas Day.

An eyewitness account of the accident indicated that the accident involved a Toyota Venza and Honda Accord cars. The two vehicles, which were said to be on top speed, were caught in a head-on collision at about 3 pm.

The two young male victims were said to be riding in the Honda Accord. Our source said they died on the spot, adding that their remains were still at the scene when he got there.

“The driver and passengers in the Venza were seriously wounded and had been taken to an unnamed hospital when we got to the scene.”

Earlier on the eve of Christmas, it was learnt that an Itsekiri contractor to an indigenous oil services company, Nest Oil, allegedly fell into the river at Sapele, Delta State, during a routine operation to supply petroleum product to the company.

An eyewitness, Akpoudje Olomaekugbe, said the remains of the victim (name withheld) was yet to be found at the time of filing this report on Boxing Day afternoon.

He said: “One of our Itsekiri brothers fell into the river this morning and till this moment, his body is not yet found. He and some of our brothers brought fuel from Sapele to houseboats at Jones Creek.

“As they were trying to moor and position their boat there, he slipped and fell into the river. Till this moment, they’re still searching for the body.”

Two cultists, three kids die in Bayelsa

A renewed supremacy battle between two cult groups in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, claimed the lives of two persons on Christmas Day.

It was gathered that members of the cult groups engaged one another in a bloody clash while most residents of the cities were in festive mood.

A security source who pleaded anonymity said the bloody conflict occurred in the afternoon along Salvation Road, Agudiana.

He said guns boomed in the area during the violent confrontation which caused panic and confusion in the area.

The source said: “There were gunshots during the fight. In the end, two members of the rival cult groups, the Highlanders and the Icelanders, were found dead at the spot. They were shot dead,” he said.

In a more tragic development, three children died while one another was hospitalised after an inferno gutted some wooden shacks at the Yenagoa axis of Swali.

It was gathered that the fire incident occurred at about 9 pm on the eve of Christmas. Property worth hundreds of thousands of naira was reportedly lost to the fire and thieves who looted many valuable items during the incident.

The incident was said to have taken the entire neighbourhood by surprise.

It was gathered that the affected children were left at home by their mother who went for vigil when the fire started.

Efforts to put out the fire by the locals failed because of lack of sufficient water.

Eyewitnesses, who said the wooden houses were burnt to ashes, rained curses on an unnamed wealthy neighbour for disallowing sympathisers to fetch water from her tanks to fight the fire.

A victim of the incident who lost valuables said her child was fortunate to have survived it.

She said she came back to her house on time after nursing some feelings that something terrible was happening in the area.

When contacted, the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Mr. Asinimi Buswat, said there was no report yet on the cult clash.

He, however, confirmed the fire incident and said it claimed the life of a six-year old girl.

“One girl died in the fire incident, not three kids,” he said. “But there is no report of any cult clash that killed two persons.”

