



18 killed as new five-storey building crumbles in Lagos

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13 rescued

Firm admits structural defect

Govt blames it on poor materials

A five-storey building under construction collapsed early yesterday in Lekki, Lagos, killing 18 people, including a woman and her child.

Thirteen people were rescued from the rubble by the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency (LASEMA) and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).

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NEMA SouthWest media coordinator Ibrahim Farinloye confirmed the death toll and the number of those rescued.

The incident occurred at Horizon 1, Lekki Gardens in Ikate, at about 3am when it was raining heavily. Many workers believed to have been trapped in the building.

It was learnt that the occupants were workers on the site and squatters who slept in the building after giving a tip to security men.

It was also learnt that the land was reclaimed in 2012 while the construction started in 2014.

Lekki Gardens, the owners of the building, claimed to have ordered stoppage of work in January at the site when it was discovered that substandard materials were being used.

As at 4:30pm, bodies were still being retrieved from the building. Residents of the area were assisting emergency workers.

Some of the victims are Beninoise.

Bereaved relatives and friends wailed as bodies were brought out.

It was also learnt that a woman and her two children who came to Nigeria on Monday from Cotonou were among those who remained trapped in the rubble last night.

The woman was said to have travelled to Lagos since her husband had not visited the family for some

time..

According to an iron bender, Fidelis Anjolo, the woman did not believe her husband's story that he was being owed as a result of which he could not travel back to see his family.

Beninoise among victims

An artisan, Mathew Ademola, who claimed that seven Beninioses were brought to work on Monday evening, said they were missing.

He said a food vendor simply identified as Hauwa remained unaccounted for.

A resident of the area, Remi, said she was searching for her brother Femi. The disturbed woman said his number was not going through.

She said: "My brother is a bricklayer. He lives in Alagbado (on the outskirts of Lagos) with his wife and children but could not afford to be going home everyday because of the transport cost.

"I don't know what to do. I have checked the bodies but he is not there. Our sister has also been trying his phone number but it is not reachable. This is pathetic. He has been catering for our needs since the death of our parents. What will be our fate if he dies?"

A carpenter, Mutiu Gani, said he and some of his friends pay security men to sleep in the building at night, adding that four of his friends were trapped.

An interior decorator blamed those handling the estate for underpaying workers, adding that he was owed N317,000.

"I have slept under the sun and in the rain as well as suffered mosquito bites. I sold my power bank to raise transport fare to this site on Monday so that I can get my money, but they have not paid me," he said.

Workers sleep inside building

"So many people, especially workers, slept here because they could not afford transport fares to their residences. When we started the work, we were paid N3,000 daily but later it was changed to N3,500 weekly. Yet, they are still owing," he said.

A Hausa community leader Babangida Bello, who claimed his seven brothers were in the building gave their names as Umar, Ado, Alu, Muhammed, Jemilu, Sabiu and Saminu.

"One of those rescued, Hassan, who hails from Kaduna State, shouted "Allah Akbar" (God is Great) as soon as he came out.

There was a mild drama at the scene after some of the residents objected to the handing over of a body to State Environmental Health Monitoring Unit (SEHMU) officials.

They demanded that the body be handed over to them to be buried in accordance with Islamic rites.

The situation almost degenerated before a senior government official said no body would be released until an autopsy is conducted according to the law.

At the time of filing this report, rescue operations were still ongoing as some people were feared trapped in the rubble.

While about five of the rescued victims were discharged after first aid at the scene, six were taken to the Lagos Island General Hospital.

The General Manager, Lagos State Building Control Agency (LASBCA), Shola Adeigbe, said: "I learned that there was an approval for the building from the district officer.

The materials used for the construction were poor materials. It was a foundation failure because it sank before collapsing. We will subject the entire building to structural stability test. The only thing for us is to ensure that they construct with quality materials."

The Commander, Rapid Response Squad (RRS), Tunde Disu, led his men to the scene to provide security. They were assisted by other security agencies, such as Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA) and Neighbourhood Watch.

A survivor, Tunde Busari, a welder from Ibadan, said the beam was faulty and he complained about it three months ago.

"I have been working with Engineer Henry for a long time. The error on the building came from the piling. It was noticed three months ago and I told them and they brought another contractor to do supporting piling. "Part of the beam was going down. The engineer that was brought gave assurance that it won't happen again. The guy who was brought out dead with me is a carpenter. His name is Sunday and he came from Abeokuta."

A sobbing woman said her son Yinka was among the victims.

The woman, who spoke in Yoruba, said: "Yinka is my first born and his father died last year. Yinka's girlfriend called me before I came here."

A man, Bangboye Olalekan, said he was looking for Sunday Dada and Ahmed, who are both carpenters.

"I was in Abeokuta, Ogun State, when I got a call that the building where they were working had collapsed and that they died. I came here to look for them. We are trying to locate their bodies," he said.

The rescue operation stopped at 7:15pm.

Building had structural defect, says Lekki Gardens

The owners of the collapsed building, Lekki Gardens, yesterday explained the circumstances that led to the incident.

The company, in a statement said: "The management of Lekki Gardens has confirmed an unfortunate incident today, Tuesday March 8th, 2016 where a building collapsed at about 4.am. in the morning, at one of its residential estate project in Lekki.

"The building which was under construction was meant to house number of apartment units but construction work had been suspended in January 2016 over reported structural defects.

"Rescue work started immediately and so far 7 people have been reported dead and others injured. The exact cause of the incident is not known at this time. All of our incident response procedure have been initiated, our support services have been mobilized and relevant authorities have been advised.

"As regards said building, investigation are being carried out to ascertain the cause of the collapse.

"In line with our usual safety standards, all sites are closed off by 6pm daily and it is mandatory that every worker leaves at that time.

"The company is cooperating with the national Emergency Management Agency, Lagos State Government, Fire Service and Lagos State Police to speed up rescue efforts. Investigation is already underway to ascertain the identities of those affected as it is not company policy for site workers to take shelter in uncompleted buildings.

"Lekki gardens is a reputable residential propert development company and has successfully completed and delivered over 6,000 units of houses across Lagos, Ogun, Rivers State and the Federal Capital territory, Abuja in the past 4 years and most of them already occupied.

The Management and staff of Lekki Gardens sincerely sympathise with the families of those who lost their lives. The company will do all in its power to ensure that those injured are fully supported."

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