

Akwa Ibom governor survives church building collapse

•Over 60 feared dead

TRAGEDY struck yesterday in Uyo, the Akwa Ibom State capital, when a church building belonging to Reigners Bible Church International, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, collapsed during church service, killing scores and leaving several others wounded. One of the survivors was the state governor, Udom Emmanuel, who was the special guest of honour at the special service.

According to an eyewitness, the incident occurred at around 11am during a special service: "Bishopric Enthronement", to mark the ordination of its resident pastor, Akan Weeks.

Police spokesperson told The Nation yesterday's evening that the actual number of casualties would be released later in the day but NAN reports last night put the figure of casualties at over 60.

As at the time when the building collapsed, eyewitnesses say the church was filled to the brim and the incident occurred shortly after the offering session, a development that brought the event to an end.

Governor Udom Emmanuel and some of his commissioners had, according to NAN reports, arrived at the special service about 30 minutes before the building collapsed. He was immediately taken away by security operatives.

NAN also reported last night that the Reigners Bible Church International building, situated on Uyo Village Road, was still under construction when it collapsed. According to the report, "Its iron rafters caved in as the service was ongoing. A witness told NAN that the building collapsed 30 minutes after the governor arrived."

"When we were about taking offering, 30 minutes after the governor came in, the building caved in. Security operatives took him away," he said.

When The Nation correspondent visited the scene, the governor was however seen helping in the rescue operation as many worshippers were



•Some of the victims of the collapsed church building, yesterday

From Kazeem Ibrahim, Uyo
trapped under the debris. Rescue team evacuated the dead and the injured.

An eyewitness said: "This is a disaster. Why today? People have been rushed to hospital while many have been trapped under the structure."

Security agents comprising men of the Nigeria Police Force, Nigerian Army, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), and officials of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), were seen condoning off the area to save the lives of the injured. Also officials of the Red Cross were seen attending to some of the worshippers with minor injuries.

Meanwhile the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Akwa Ibom State branch has set up a response team to the

Reigners Bible Church following the Church building that collapsed this morning.

The team is coordinated by a past chairman of the association, Dr John Udobang.

The NMA in a statement by its chairman, Dr Aniekeme Uwah, said: "In order to aid the response team carry out her duty of responding to the mass casualty and to save the lives of our people, I hereby call on all well meaning citizens to rise up to the occasion of being our brothers' keepers by voluntarily donating blood needed for transfusion."

"Kindly go to the blood banks of University of Uyo Teaching Hospital (UUTH) and St Luke's Hospital, Anua, Uyo."

When contacted, the FRSC's spokesman in the state, Mr.

Godsgift Uwen, said officials of the commission were currently at the scene of incident.

When asked the number of casualties resulting from the collapsed building, Uwen said, "I am not competent to give you information on this matter for now. I will advise you call the Police Public Relations Officer."

Speaking on the development, the State's Police Public Relations Officer, ASP Cordelia Nwawe, could not confirm the number of casualties.

She said: "This is a very unfortunate incident. The governor is safe. A lot of the people are safe. People have been rushed to the hospital. By evening, we will be able to talk about the number of casualties. We are here to ensure that hoodlums do not take over the place."

I'm yet to be briefed on the number of casualties, says Police PRO

THE Akwa Ibom State

Press Secretary to the Governor

ascertain the immediate and