



One-hour fire wrecks family in Aba

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Their son dead, apartment up in flames and the rest of the household in hospital, all this Aba family needs is help, reports SUNNY NWANKWO

In just 60 minutes they lost their only son and with him their apartment. The other survivors are in hospital being treated for various degrees of burns. Mr David Chukwu and his family have been grieving since the February 20 inferno in Aba, the Abia State commercial capital. They need help urgently.

Chukwu's son, seven-year-old Godswill, did not die immediately; he passed on five days after, in hospital. Chukwu's wife, Favour, his six-year-old daughter Rachel, and six-month-old Miracle also sustained burns and were admitted in hospital.

Our reporter, who met Godswill and other members of his family a day before he died, learnt that it took over three hours for his wounds to be dressed. The children's cries while the dressing lasted could melt a stony heart.

Godswill asked for watermelon and a malt drink, showing no sign of stress. Thereafter, he slept peacefully while the reporter interviewed his parents. Rachel pestered her parents for one thing or the other while the youngest child slept off after being breastfed.

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Speaking to reporters, Mr. Chukwu, an indigene of Okoko Item in Bende Local Government Area of the state, said he lost everything he had laboured for over the years to the fire including the wares that he had wanted to take to the market the next day.

Chukwu said he was at the church when the incident happened, adding that all they could salvage from their one-room apartment was the clothing he has been wearing since the fire.

The family has been surviving on charity, he said.

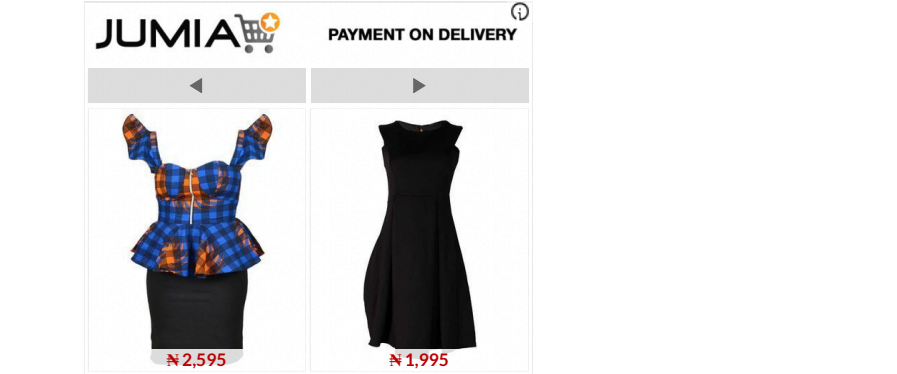
Chukwu said, "I was not at home when the incident happened because I went to church for a programme. I was told that after my wife poured kerosene into the lantern and struck a match, an explosion occurred. I bought the kerosene and we have been using it to cook on our stove three days before that incident. But the cause of the fire is what I cannot explain, because if it were to be adulterated kerosene, the one we have been using to cook would have exploded before the fire incident. My neighbours and others who were at the scene at the time of the incident said that they took them to various hospitals including the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital where the hospitals rejected them before they were brought to this hospital where they have been receiving treatment.

Since that day, I don't go to market again because the goods I wanted to go to the bush market with the next day including cash left in the house were all gone in the fire. I only spend my day here at the hospital to take care of them with some of my family members and relatives.

"The doctor hasn't told us how much our medical bill is, though they have been doing their best since we came to see how they can save the life of my wife and other children.

"I want to use this opportunity to appeal to the governor of the state, Dr. Okezie Ikpeazu, his wife and other public-spirited individuals to come to our aid. They should come to the rescue of my family. They should come to save my wife and my surviving daughters. We are in a great pain at the moment."

Mrs. Favour David said they came out of the fire alive through the timely intervention of neighbours and passersby.



She said, "When the explosion occurred, the fire went straight to the door and started burning the door. It was at that time that I rushed at the door and eventually forced myself out with the little baby that I was carrying at my back. It was in that process that I and my baby sustained fire burns. Godswill and Rachel were brought out from the fire by neighbours who rushed us to ABSUTH (Abia State Teaching Hospital) and other private hospitals including SDA, but we were all rejected because of our condition. But when we were brought here (MAZPA), they admitted us and have been attending to us."

Mrs. Chukwu said that the family has been feeding through the assistance of members of the public who on hearing what happened to them will come with food items.

She called on the state governor, Dr. Victor Okezie Ikpeazu, his wife, Nkechi, corporate and religious organisations including public spirited individuals to come to their aide, stressing that the burden of paying their hospital bills and starting life afresh was too much for them to bear.

The chairman of MAZPA Specialist Hospital, Dr. Ekezie Ejikem in a telephone interview with our correspondent disclosed that late Godswill had 95percent burn and that makes his chances of survival slim.

According to Dr. Ejikem, "If the boy had survived, he would have had his legs amputated because they (legs) were badly burnt by the fire that engulfed their home. For the other members of the family, we are

monitoring their progress. The last baby had about 20 percent burn, the mum, about 40 and the 6-year-old about 50 or 60 percent respectively."

He said that the hospital bills of the victims estimated to be in the region of N2million.

Donations for the hospital bills and upkeep of the family should be made through this United Bank for Africa's (UBA) account number 2004684231 with account name Onuoha Chukwu, father of the fire victims.

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