

# Sorrow, anger trail Lagos tanker explosion as two die in another accident close to scene

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Sorrow, tears and anger continued to trail the tanker explosion that claimed nine lives and razed 54 vehicles on the popular Otedola Bridge in Alausa area of Ikeja on Thursday.

When The Nation visited the scene of the accident yesterday, many of the sympathisers and eyewitnesses at the spot insisted that the death toll from the accident was more than the figure quoted by rescue agencies.

Others said the casualties could have been fewer if the nearby Otedola Estate had not shut its gates against victims who sought refuge at the estate.

A sympathiser who claimed to know a woman who lost four children to the explosion lamented, saying: “Four children in one fell swoop? God! That is too much to bear for a woman. Where would the woman begin from, particularly now that she is older.”

An eyewitness, Mrs Adijat Okanlomo, said a number of deceased victims would have been saved from death if they had been allowed to move their cars into the estate immediately the fire broke out.

Okanlomo said: "A number of the victims died while they were trying to escape from the scene. Many of them ran towards the nearby Otedola Estate but the gate to the estate was shut on them and they were consumed by the raging fire while they were looking for escape routes.

"It was this same spot that another tanker explosion killed many innocent people a few years ago. A popular Yoruba actor and film producer, Alade Aromire, also died at this spot while he was trying avoid a stationery tanker.

"Government should stop tankers from moving in day time. If they are not stopped from travelling during the day, accidents will continue to happen here."

Another eyewitness, Austin Okonofua, echoed Okanlomo, saying: "Had it been that Otedola Estate's gate was not locked against victims who ran there for safety, some of those who lost their lives would have survived. Although it has become the habit of security men at the estate to prevent motorists from passing through the estate, in an emergency situation like that, they should have allowed them to pass through."

Sulaiman Adamu, an operator of a commercial motorcycle popularly called okada, said four school pupils were among the casualties, adding that a woman was almost burnt to death while she was rushing out of her car.

He said: "I had just dropped a passenger at Isheri and the incident occurred while I was returning. Among the vehicles burnt, I saw a bus carrying school pupils who were returning from school at about 5.20 pm.

"The bodies of the pupils were still there when I left the scene yesterday. Four of the pupils were children of a woman who rushed there and burst into tears. She was being consoled by bystanders. The account of FRSC that nine persons died in the incident may not be correct because the children burnt to death were more than 11."

#### Items found at accident scene

A Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) 2015 conference bag containing a brush, toothpaste, company invoices and a complimentary card belonging to one Uchenna Nwadialo was among the items spotted at the scene. Attempt to confirm the whereabouts of the bearer from the law firm of Emeka Ngige displayed on the card was futile. When our correspondent called the firm's mobile telephone number displayed on the card, a female voice, who did not identify herself but claimed to be one of the partners at the law firm, denied any knowledge of Nwadialo.

"There is no such name among the partners here. I am one of the partners in the law firm of Emeka Ngige and I can tell you that we do not have anyone or lawyer bearing the name you just mentioned in our employ," she said.

Although Nwadialo's complimentary card claims he was the social secretary of the Lagos branch of NBA, with office at Lagos High Court complex in Igbosere, it was also difficult to ascertain his membership via a mobile telephone number on the card.

A male voice who answered the call placed by our correspondent to the number said the telephone number did not belong to Lagos NBA.

Other items found at the scene include the land transaction documents and invoice bearing the name of a man, Imoisi Julius Omoregie and his wife, Blessing Omoregie Imoisi.

### Another tragedy

While the evacuation exercise was ongoing yesterday, another accident involving a Hummer bus and Volkswagen Vanagon bus collided, killing two persons close to the scene of the tanker explosion at about 11 am.

The driver of the Vanagon bus was driving on the wrong side of the road on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway and was running away from some law enforcement agents when it collided with the Hummer bus. The bodies of the victims and their vehicles were evacuated from the scene by rescue personnel of the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency (LASEMA).

Director of Search and Rescue Operations, National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), Air Commodore Akugbe Iyamu, said the agency would ensure the injured are taken care of.

He said: "I am here on behalf of the Director General of NEMA, who has asked me to come here and express his sympathy to the relatives of people who lost their lives and those who lost their property to the tanker explosion. The DG has asked me to assess the situation and give him a report when I return to the office.

"You know that it's NEMA's responsibility to manage emergencies anywhere in Nigeria, and this is just one of them. When I go back to our office, we shall give our report to ensure that the injured among the victims are well taken care of or get relief.

"My job is also to see how my men have intervened in search and rescue operations in situations like this, and I am satisfied with the performance of our operatives so far because they have been able to coordinate other agencies such as LASEMA, FRSC and others to carry out rescue and evacuation exercise here."