

Abuja building collapse: Death toll hits 3

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•Victims' relatives protest

The National Emergency Management Agency, (NEMA) yesterday confirmed the death of another victim who was trapped in the building that collapsed on Friday in the Jabi area of Abuja.

This brings the death toll from the collapse to three.

According to NEMA, six other people were rescued alive from the rubble of the collapsed four-storey building, with one of them critically injured.

The NEMA Director-General, Mustapha Maihaja, who visited the site of the collapsed building yesterday, confirmed "the rescue of seven persons. One person is dead, one critically injured and five others were rescued alive."

He also stated that the rescue operation at the site of the building collapse had been called off.

But this did not go down well with relatives of victims as they protested the decision.

They were dispersed by policemen who fired tear gas and shot into the air.

The angry youths insisted that about 18 victims were still trapped under the rubble, but the FCT Administration said there was no indication that anyone was buried under the debris.

The rescue team consisting of officials of FCT Emergency Management Agency, National Emergency Management Agency, fire fighters and Julius Berger Plc ended the rescue operation around 8am after they failed to find victims.

But the youths who were annoyed by the removal of the pay loaders and other equipment attempted to take over the site, insisting that many victims were still trapped under the

debris and should be rescued.

A tricycle rider, Mustapha Musa, said his younger brother, Aliu, 23, was among those trapped under the rubble, adding that his elder brother, Ali Mohammed, 30, who was among the victims that were rescued died while being taken to the hospital.

“I have a brother there. Yesterday (Friday) we called our brother and we were talking to him on phone, but he was complaining of the heat. This morning (Saturday), we called him but we did not get him. So the government did not do anything and our people are still under the rubble,” he insisted.

The Coordinator, Abuja Municipal Metropolitan Council, Umar Shuaibu, who was at the scene yesterday explained that the rescue workers could not find any signs of life or body.

He disclosed that only one died out of the seven victims that were rescued, insisting that no other casualty was discovered during the overnight rescue operation.

“We worked overnight with floodlight, we were able to comb out everything and found that there is no single person buried anywhere under this rubble. We combed everywhere even where we don’t expect to have bodies, the machines went and did a professional job.

“Apart from the initial victims-we have one dead and six people were injured, apart from them, no other casualty was discovered,” Shuaibu stated.

The AMMC boss said that investigation had commenced to find out possible lapses to prevent a recurrence, adding that the debris would be evacuated.

He warned scavengers to keep off the site, cautioning that anyone found at the scene would be arrested by the security personnel.

Acting deputy director, forecasting, response and mitigation, FCT Emergency Agency Management Authority, Florence Wenegieme stated that the responders drilled into the core of the collapsed structure but did not find bodies.

She explained that officials had been directed to ascertain the number of the dead and injured victims at the hospital.

Wenegieme said, "As at yesterday (Friday), only one person died, for the other people they claimed were in the building, we have been searching since last night and we have not been able to find any corpse or anybody alive.

"So we cannot say that there are still people inside because we have searched right deep into the building but we could not find anyone."

Mr Eze Celestine, member, Architects Association of Nigeria, said that the professional bodies were concerned about the incidence of collapsed buildings in the country.

Celestine advised that there should be relevant professionals in every construction site in the country, not just anybody, to ensure the environment is safe for all concerned.

"In any construction site in Nigeria not only Abuja, there should be a regulatory industry personnel.

"Not where anybody will come and claim that he is an architect, engineer or a builder. The enforcement has to be stronger," he said.

Speaking to NAN, Mr Agboola Abolade of the Council for the Regulation of Engineering in Nigeria (COREN), called for the need to engage professionals in construction to avoid unfortunate incidences as a collapse.

He explained that from the inspection on the site it was very likely that the kind of concrete mix that was used in constructing must have been below the standard specified in the design.

"By looking at the nature of the rubbles we have here, you can see that it is likely that the kind of concrete mix used was below the standard.

"If the mix was done properly we should have had a partial collapse. Even if the foundation gave way, other parts of the building could have been standing.

"Normally, since the building has been abandoned for a long time the concrete was supposed to get stronger over the years due to the incurring process of water and air," Abolade said.

In the meantime, the Abuja Metropolitan Management Council (AMMC) is to launch an immediate investigation into the circumstances surrounding the collapse of the four-storey building.

The Coordinator of the council, Mr. Umar Shuaibu, told reporters at the scene yesterday that steps are being taken to prevent any future occurrence.

Six others were rescued with various degrees of injuries and were rushed to a nearby hospital, Shuaibu said.

“This is an accident. What happened is an unfortunate incidence. We have this kind of building collapse occurrence all over the world, not only in Nigeria,” he said.

“We are going to start our investigations now; we are going to take adequate measures to prevent any future occurrence.

“We have passed the first phase, the next phase is evacuating these rubbles and we implore the general public not to be here.

“There are so many scavengers around, so we are going to instruct security agencies that anybody they catch around this area should be arrested,” he said.

He, however, noted that all the stakeholders worked overnight to ensure lives were saved and not a single soul was buried under the rubbles.

He commended stakeholders for their quick action to tackle the situation.