

NLC knocks Chinese firm over anti-workers' policy



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- Umbrella union demands better working conditions for Nigerians



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The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) has protested alleged anti-labour practices by a Chinese construction firm, Shaanxi Construction Engineering Group Corporation.

The umbrella labour union spoke while picketing the Chinese company, temporarily shutting down construction work at the new headquarters of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) at Lugbe in Abuja.

Angry construction workers, who are affiliates of the NLC, pulled down the gate at the construction site and made their way into the premises.

This followed the resistance by the shutting down of the company's gate against the protesting NLC leadership.

As early as 7.30 a.m, workers gathered at the NLC headquarters at Labour House in Abuja to mobilise for the picketing of the Chinese construction company handling the construction of the ECOWAS new office complex.

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The management of the construction company did not address reporters who covered the protest; neither did the company's officials respond to labour union's allegations.

The Chinese government had undertaken to build the new ECOWAS Secretariat as part of an aid package to the regional body.

Addressing the protesting workers, NLC's General Secretary Emma Ugboaja decried the alleged inhuman treatment meted out to Nigerian workers at the construction site.

The union leader said the NLC responded to a complaint by the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) chapter of the construction workers' union over bad working conditions of Nigerians at the construction site.

He said the Chinese company engaged the workers without conditions of service attached or welfare or medical services in place.

Ugboaja regretted that due to the deplorable work conditions at the place, one of the workers, a driver, identified simply as Augustine, died out of neglect and lack of timely medical attention.

Reacting to the death of the driver, Ugboaja said: “Mrs. Ruth Augustine migrated with her husband and family to Abuja to earn a living. Now, the man, in an effort to help build ECOWAS a secretariat, has ended up six feet down, leaving his poor widow to face the vagaries of life: no pension, no gratuity, no food, no water, and no explanation. Where will help come from?

“Everyday, we plead with the government to provide a minimal social security floor, to no avail. That is the challenge we have. This challenge is real.”