

## FEATURE

# How Fire Consumed 3 Children in Jigawa

By ABDULLAHI YAKUBU

**T**HE story of fire consuming domestic edifice, money and other valuables in Nigeria is not an entirely new thing, considering the number of episodes that happened at various places and different scenes where such incidents occurred.

Strange news about fire in Nigeria is sometimes happening against the backdrop of the tremendous campaign intensified by the firefighting agencies who often caution people against the negligent use of inflammable materials and local lamps.

Firefighters do warn people to be wary of what the dreaded monster can do in destroying hopes and force tears to cascade down the cheeks of affected victim. They say it is normally safer to dare the most dangerous python instead of joking with fire. The magnitude of havoc and the tormenting experience it leaves its victims in whenever it strikes is beyond description.

Fire had just proved its supremacy, once again, on the family of the helpless Ahabuiké, an Igbo man residing at Hakimi Street in Dutse, the Jigawa State capital, about 7:30 in the night. They were all unavoidably absent at home when fire struck and claimed the lives of his three children.

The children, Chichi 8 years, Chidiebere 5 years and Kelechi 2 years were burnt beyond recognition, while neighbours who could have helped out were concerned with saving their personal property rather than the lives of the innocent children. The charred remains of the three children had been taken away to the mortuary by the time our reporter visited the scene of the fire outbreak.

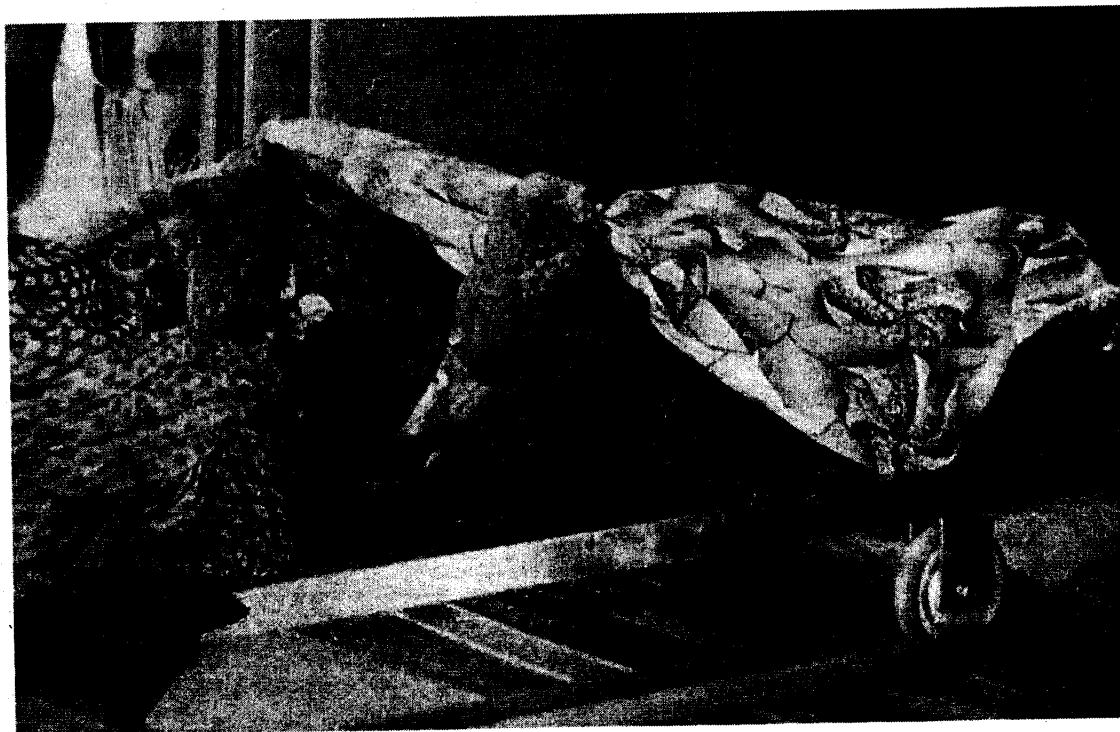
Most of the sympathizers who thronged the compound could not understand how a fire incident that claimed the lives of three children and gutted the property of the Ahabuikés happened without the neighbours hearkening to the painful cry of little children, at least to make effort to even break the wall for the children to be rescued.

What one could really deduce is a case of grudges or enmity taken too far leading to inhumanity of man to man. The father of the deceased children, Emeka Ahabuiké who spoke to *New Nigerian on Sunday* at the compound, where the incident happened said he and his wife were not at home when the incident occurred.

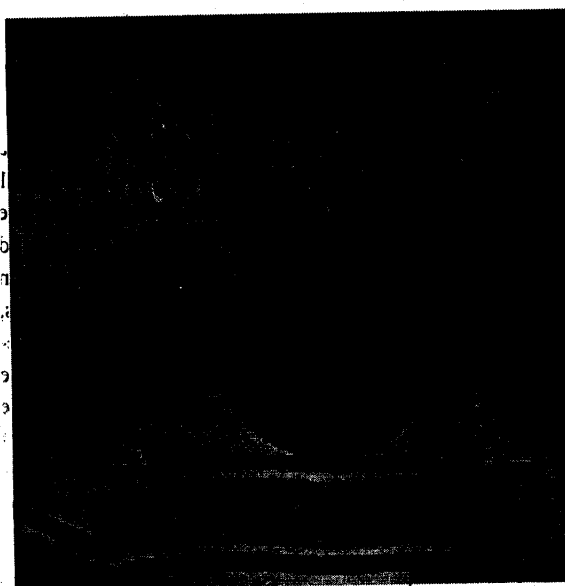
He said he received a phone call at 8:21pm only to rush home to meet the charred remains of his beloved children. Ahabuiké, who hails from Isuikwuato Ovim in Abia State, pointed out that he did not know the source of the fire that killed his three children. He said he did not allow the use of candle or any other possible



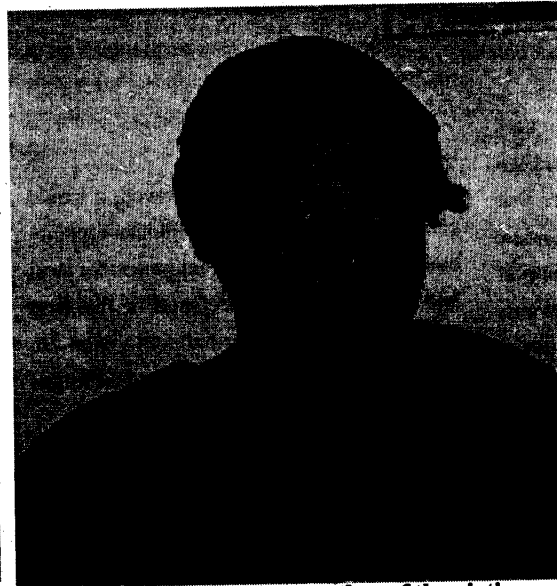
One of the burnt rooms



Charred remains of Chichi, one of the children



Mr Emeka Ahabuiké, father of the victims



Mrs Ngozi Ahabuiké, mother of the victims

fire risk in his home.

"The late Chichi (daughter to my wife's sister) came to live with us. Her mother died on 28th August, 2011.

Cidiebere and Kelechi were our biological children. They were so dear to us that we struggled to take care of them," he said.

He indicated that he run a fast-food joint at Rafinsanyi area of Dutse, while his wife Ngozi works as a receptionist at Rozy Guest House very close to their residence.

"After school the children usually stayed with me in my fast-food joint till around 8pm when their mother would close from her place of work and come and take them home, but

because of the cold we now sent them home by 5:45pm on that fateful day and not up to two hours the children were already in flames," he said.

On the attitude of his neighbours he said it was inhuman, adding that he could not recall if he had any differences to settle with any of them to deserve the kind of wickedness they meted out to the innocent children.

"One of them broke a part of his wall to gain entry into his house to remove his property, while another young man picked his television," he

said.

Nduka Ahabuiké, the elder brother to Emeka, could not fathom how the house would burn till the children were burnt to ashes and yet none of the neighbours could raise any alarm or help.

He said it was strange for neighbours to stay aloof and watch tragedy befall a fellow human being. He said tragedy was not reserved for any particular family as it could happen to anybody.

"It is unfortunate that in a compound of about ten tenants none of them could assist. It is not possible for those at home to say they did not perceive the smell of burning clothes or hear cries of these children to come to their aid," he said.

The mother of the late children, who has been mourning the loss together with the husband, is currently being housed by her employer. She pointed out that she bathed the children and took them to the husband's shop, saying that in the evening because of the cold weather they were taken home and less than two hours later she received a call.

"I rushed back home, lo and behold, it was in my room the fire was burning and my children had been consumed. I was asking everybody but there was no reasonable answer; they were gone. But I know they are in the bosom of God because they are innocent," she said.

She said she had resigned her fate to God adding that she was not holding anything against the neighbours for their attitude.

Samson Ijeoma, an Engineer who hails from the same town as the Ahabuikés, condemned the attitude of the neighbours, saying that even if the woman had done wrong by lighting candle for the children they should have saved them. He said leaving the children to be burnt despite their cries was wicked, adding that the authorities should investigate the neighbours.

However, an eyewitness who spoke to our correspondent on condition of anonymity said the Ahabuikés have been at loggerheads with their neighbours, hence when the incident happened they only rushed to take their own documents should the fire consume the entire building. He said fire service men came to save the situation but the damage had been done before their arrival.

The police spokesperson, ASP Abdul Jijini, when contacted said the police were aware of the incident, adding that they deployed their operatives to the compound around 8:00pm when the incident occurred. He said they suspected the fire outbreak must have emanated from a candlelight the children might have been using as a source of illumination since there was no electricity supply at the time.

The landlord (of the house), Alhaji Dalha Yusuf, said only God knows how the fire broke out since it occurred late in the evening, adding that what happened should be seen as an act of God. He called on the authorities to come to the aid of the bereaved family who had lost not only all their children, but also all they had worked for.

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