

## Mystery fire kills Kano REC, wife, daughters

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- Bodies found in toilet
- Neighbours allege foul play

Seven days after he supervised the presidential election in Kano State in which the All Progressives Congress (APC) candidate, Major General Muhammadu Buhari, scored 1.9 million votes, the Resident Electoral Commissioner in the state, Alhaji Minkaila Abdullahi, has died in an inferno.

He was found dead in a toilet alongside his wife

and two daughters following a mystery fire that gutted their Kano residence.

Neighbours and sympathisers at the scene called for a probe of the death, saying they suspected a foul play.

Men of the state Criminal Investigation Department (CID) promptly sealed off the scene while police authorities have commenced investigations into the disaster.

Abdullahi, who oversaw last Saturday's presidential and National Assembly elections in the state, died in the early hours of Friday in a fire in his official residence on Kashim Road, Nassarawa GRA, Kano.

His wife, Zulaiha, and two daughters, Aisha and Asmau, also died in the incident.

The police said the family died from inhalation of smoke. They said the fire was triggered by a faulty air conditioner.

The INEC chief and his family, it was gathered, died trying to escape the fire through the window of a toilet in the building.

Spokesperson of the state Police Command, Magaji Majiya, an Assistant Superintendent of Police, said the fire was suspected to have been caused by a spark at about 4.00 a.m.

According to him, as the fire spread to other parts of the house, Abdullahi and his family tried to escape through the toilet window but were blocked by a barrier fixed there to prevent burglary.

The state Commissioner of Police, Ibrahim Idris, and the Deputy Police Commissioner in-charge of Criminal Investigation Department reportedly rushed to the scene.

The unconscious REC and his family members were taken to Murtala Muhammad Hospital, Kano, where they were confirmed dead.

The police commissioner, addressing journalists later said that: "Today, at about 0430hrs, policemen on guard duty at

the official residence of the REC, Kano State, Alhaji Minkaila Abdullahi, located at No 2, Sir Kashim Road, Nassarawa GRA, Kano, observed a fire from a split AC in the sitting room.

“They made several attempts to get in touch with him, including banging on the doors and breaking some of the toilet windows but he was not responding. The policemen and local guards consequently broke the door leading to the sitting room and discovered the sitting room had been engulfed by fire and smoke.”

He noted that in an attempt to rescue the family, they (security men in his house) looked everywhere in the house before the deceased were found in the toilet of the master bedroom.

However, Idris dismissed insinuations of foul play in the tragedy.

The policemen who carried out the abortive rescue operation said Abdullahi died hugging one of his daughters, while the other lay close to the mother.

The director of the state fire service, Alhaji Balarabe Kabara, said his men received a distress call from the neighbours of the deceased around 4.30 a.m.

While the police said they were waiting for the result of an autopsy on the remains of Mr Abdullahi and his family members, the spokesperson for the state office of INEC, Garba Muhammed, said the bodies of the victims were already being conveyed to Abdullahi’s home town, Gantsa, in Buji Local Government Area of Jigawa State, for burial in accordance with Islamic tradition.

Some neighbours, who declined to be named for fear of possible harassment by the police, said the fire was strange and suggested the police should not consider the incident as ordinary.

They wondered why a spark from an air conditioner would engulf an entire building and kill its occupants so fast.

Meanwhile, the remains were buried amid tears on Friday afternoon in Dutse with the chairman of INEC, Professor Attahiru Jega, expressing shock over the tragedy.

“It is shocking. Minkaila was one of the commissioners I was fond of. He was gentle, committed, honest and hardworking. May his soul rest in peace,” Jega told journalists in Dutse after the burial.

The INEC boss had earlier observed the Friday congregational prayer alongside Governor Sule Lamido, Secretary to the Kano State Government, the Emir of Dutse, representative of the Emir of Kano and thousands of other Muslims in Dutse central mosque.

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