

Jos building tragedy: Gov orders closure of school, integrity test on others

• 81 victims discharged from hospital • My son still under debris, mother tells gov • FG, APC, PDP, First Lady express sadness

From Isaac Shobayo, Leon Usigbe, Clement Idoko, Kehinde Akintola

WORRIED by the building collapse that claimed the lives of 22 students at Saint Academy in Jos, Plateau State, on Friday, Governor Caleb Mutwang has ordered the closure of the school and directed appropriate agencies to carry out technical audit of all schools in the state to test their structural integrity.

The governor also gave a marching order to residents of the state who built along river banks to leave.

Governor Mutwang, who gave these orders shortly after an inspection of the site where the school building collapsed, said the government could no longer take further chances, adding that most of the private schools in the state do not conform to the laid-down rules and regulations.

"The drive for profit must not overshadow the safety of lives, so we are going to take steps immediately to do a technical audit of all the schools. We are going to test their structural integrity to ensure that they are fit for human habitation.

"Some buildings were not built in the right places or without approval. Some buildings were built without the right materials. And so, we are going to take time to correct these things.

"I won't just blame the school. I will also blame our public officials who were supposed to supervise these buildings but didn't do their job. So by the grace of God, we're going to set up a committee

to investigate this incident. Yes, we're going to bring in building professionals to investigate this. And anyone found culpable will certainly face the wrath of the law.

"We cannot afford this situation any longer. That is why we signed Executive Order 003 to bring order and sanity into our environments. When we insist that some buildings be demolished, it's not because we are wicked. We are concerned about the safety of our lives.

"That's why when we see buildings on water lines or in marshy places, we have no option but to bring them down. And people think we are wicked. But we are going to go the extra mile now and make sure that violators are also prosecuted. We will not just bring down the buildings at a government cost."

Governor Mutwang disclosed that the state government would foot the bill of those receiving treatment at various hospitals within the state capital and further stated that anyone found mining within residential areas should be treated as a criminal.

Meanwhile, the state government has declared a three-day period of mourning from July 13 to July 15. During this period, all flags will be flown at half-mast to honor the victims.

Also, 81 victims of the school building collapse have been discharged from the various hospitals they were admitted to as of Saturday afternoon.

Dr Abel Izang, the Chairman, Medical Advisory Committee (CMAC) of Plateau Specialist Hospital, disclosed this in an interview with the *News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)*, on Saturday

in Jos.

Izang said that out of the 39 patients hospitalised on Friday, 23 had been discharged, while two were referred to the Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH) due to spinal injuries.

Izang further said that the five patients who were still on admission were in stable condition.

Similarly, Professor Steve Anzaku, the Chief Medical Director (CMD) of Bingham University Teaching Hospital, said that out of the 55 hospitalised, 23 were discharged and those on admission were in stable condition.

Mrs Chioma Ofofille, the Public Relations Officer of Our Lady of Apostles (OLA) Hospital, said 23 out of the 32 patients brought to the facility had been discharged, while the remaining nine were in stable condition.

Dr Josiah Njem, the Chairman, Medical Advisory Committee (CMAC) of the Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH), told NAN that the six victims of the collapsed building hospitalised in the hospital with various injuries were in stable condition.

Also on Saturday, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) expressed grief over the incident.

A statement issued on Saturday by Debo Ologunagba, National Publicity Secretary, said the party was deeply distraught by the incident which has brought agony, sorrow and pain to students, teachers, parents, families, the government and people of Plateau State and the nation.

"Indeed, the heartrending death of these young Nigerian children who left their respective homes to school

in search of knowledge and pursuit of their dreams and aspirations came as a huge blow to our nation and humanity; and we pray that their death will not be in vain," it said.

The PDP commiserated with Governor Mutwang, standing in prayers with the teachers, parents, siblings and families of the victims as well as the injured at this trying time.

The party also commended Mutwang for his swift intervention for search and rescue operation, recovery and provision of all necessary emergency aids including prompt evacuation of victims and medical assistance to the injured.

First Lady sympathises with families of victims

The First Lady, Mrs Oluremi Tinubu, also expressed grief over the incident, saying it is very sad to lose children with promising future.

She condoled with Governor Mutwang and the families of the victims, praying that God will comfort them over the loss.

The wife of the president said: "It is indeed sad to hear the news of the school building collapse in Jos, which claimed the lives of our innocent children and their teachers.

"My heartfelt condolences go to the Governor of Plateau State, the bereaved families and the entire people of the state.

"It is disheartening to lose these children with a promising future. Words are not enough to console you, but I pray that God comforts you all and grants you the strength to bear the devastating loss."

Governors mourn victims
The 36 governors under

the aegis of Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF) on Saturday expressed resolve to prioritize safety of students in both public and private schools across the country.

NGF Chairman, Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq, gave the assurance through a statement issued by acting Head of Media, Ahmed Halimah, pledging the Forum's readiness to support efforts to mitigate the impact of the collapsed school which occurred in Plateau State as well as prevent future occurrences.

"The Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF), today expressed deep sorrow and extend their heartfelt condolences to the families affected by the tragic collapse of a school building in Plateau State.

"The incident, which occurred on July 12 resulted in the loss of multiple lives and left many injured. The Nigeria Governors' Forum stands in solidarity with the people of Plateau and the affected families during this difficult time.

"We commend the swift response of the rescue teams and the efforts of the state government in managing this crisis.

"As the state government continues to provide support and comfort to the affected families, the NGF is ready to support efforts to help mitigate the impact of this tragedy and prevent future occurrences. Safety in our schools is paramount, and we must take immediate steps to address any lapses.

"We are committed to supporting Plateau State in providing necessary assistance to the affected families. May the Almighty grant the families the strength and courage to bear this ir-

reparable loss.

"Our prayers and thoughts are with Governor Mutwang, the Busa-Buji community, and the entire Plateau State during this difficult time."

FG expresses sympathy

The Federal Government has expressed its sympathy over the loss of some students and teachers caused by the collapse of the school building.

Minister of Education, Professor Tahir Mamman, in statement on Saturday in Abuja, commiserated with the Governor of Plateau State, Caleb Manasseh Mutwang, the bereaved families, the families of all the injured victims, and the entire people of Plateau State.

Mamman said: "It is with deep sorrow that we received the devastating news of the collapse building in Saints Academy, Busa-Buji in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State, which occurred during school hours when classes were in session.

"The entire Federal Ministry of Education feels a sense of collective loss and sorrow over the death of these young ones especially occurring when they were writing exams meant to advance their level of education.

"Our heartfelt condolences go to the Governor of Plateau State, the bereaved families, the families of all the injured victims, and the entire people of Plateau State.

"May the souls of the departed rest in peace, and may the injured ones recover speedily. We stand in solidarity with the affected community during this difficult time."