

Kerosene explosions kill 10 in Warri

**Sola Adebayo and
Clara Nwachukwu**

NO fewer than 10 persons have died in kerosene explosions in Warri and Effurun, Delta State, in the past four days.

Our correspondents learnt that more than 20 other victims of adulterated kerosene were in critical condition at the Warri Central Hospital and other medical centres in the state as at Sunday.

Although our correspondents could not ascertain the source of the 'killer' kerosene, it was gathered that the devastating explosions had rocked many homes in Warri and Effurun since Thursday.

The explosions reportedly occurred when the victims were refilling their stoves to prepare meals.

Two of the victims died on Thursday night, while

eight others died before Sunday morning.

The managements of the hospitals did not release the list of the victims.

But it was, however, gathered that a 14-year-old daughter of a medical officer of the Warri Central Hospital was one of the deceased.

Already, the increasing number of victims has overstretched resources at the Central hospital.

A victim, Mrs. Stella Alperin, suffered 100-degree burns. Also, her three children, aged between two and seven years, who were in the kitchen when she lit the stove, were burnt.

However, her children could not be admitted to the hospital due to shortage of bed space.

The Medical Director of the hospital, Dr. Francis Omasola, described the incident as tragic.

Omasola, in a telephone

interview on Sunday, called for public awareness on the prevalence of the 'killer' kerosene in the state.

He said 22 persons were on admission at the hospital.

Despite the gravity of the explosions, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation has denied liability in the explosions.

A spokesman for the corporation, who pleaded anonymity, said on the telephone, "Our liability ends at the depot."

According to him, "When we import kerosene, our liability stops at the depot. It is possible that the product was adulterated after leaving our depots."

He said that even if the NNPC was the sole importer of the product, the fault could not come from the corporation.

According to him, "There would have been explosions

all over the country by now, not just from a particular locality."

The source explained that when the NNPC imported the scarce commodity, the product was discharged at the depots of the independent marketers, NIPCO Plc, and the private depot operators, DAPMA in Apapa, for onward loading by fuel trucks.

He said it was a deliberate safety policy of the NNPC to distinguish kerosene by colouration and to make it less expensive than the premium motor spirit (petrol).

But market realities indicate that while petrol sells for

N70 per litre, kerosene sells for more than N90 per litre, contrary to the regulated price of N59.

The NNPC official noted that the high cost of kerosene might have been responsible for the adulteration of the product that led to the explosions.

He said those behind the adulteration would be making higher profits from the transaction in view of the high cost of kerosene.

"If they mix it (kerosene) with petrol, it could be dangerous and lead to possible explosions," he added.

The Group General Man-

ager, Group Public Affairs, Dr. Levi Ayunmuna, could not be reached at press time. All calls to his line did not go through.

The last kerosene explosion took place in Benue, Edo State, in January 2001, in which 750 people escaped death.

Even then, both the state government and the NNPC traded insults on who was responsible. But the corporation ended up paying about N25m for damages and compensation for another N30m for the treatment of some 68 victims that suffered various degrees of burns from the incident.

AC asks EFCC to probe third term funds

Olaekan Adetayo

THE Action Congress on Sunday called on the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission to in-

vestigate a claim by a former Governor of Jigawa State,

key issues?

"While we admit that it is no excuse for any government to say he allegedly looted his state's treasury to fund the third term bid, it is necessary to know how the reportedly looted funds were spent."

"After all, we all know