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## Woman loses four children, two siblings to early morning fire

By Ayodele Ale and Sesan Olufowobi

Published: Saturday, 27 Dec 2008

While millions of people around the world were busy enjoying the yuletide, Umu Trame, a Guinean living in Lagos, had the misfortune of mourning four children and two siblings who were burnt to death in a night fire that occurred on Friday.



The building

At her Fehintola Street, Aguda, Surulere, Lagos, home on Friday, scores of sympathisers, mostly of Guinean and Senegalese descent, surrounded her and tried in vain to calm her down as she wailed uncontrollably. "For a woman to lose four children, a brother and a sister at once, no human being can explain this but God," one of the sympathisers lamented.



Umu Trame, mother of the victims

One of the residents of the house, who declined to give his name, told Saturday Punch that he was woken up from his sleep by shouts of fire from his wife. "The fire started around 2.30 am. My wife was shouting fire, fire, fire. I thought it was the neighbouring house that was being gutted, but my wife insisted that it was our house. When I realised that it was our house, I picked my children and ran out of the building," he said. The occupants of the remaining four flats followed suit, abandoning their properties.

Saturday Punch, gathered that the fire, which occurred at the last floor of the three-storey building, was caused by a lit candle.

"This is not a country. We have been living without light in this area for more than four months and no one is talking, simply because the residents were all big people with generators," one of the tenants said, adding that the entire area was in total blackout when the fire started.

Unfortunately, seven persons in the flat were sleeping, while their mother had travelled to Lome, the capital city of Togo, to buy some goods.

Within minutes, the fire had spread to other parts of the flat, while the victims struggled in vain to get the door opened.

One of the residents, Mohammed Ahmed, said, "The affected children are my younger brother's children. They would have escaped, but the person that locked the door did not know where he kept the key.

"When they came to call me around 2.30am that my brother's flat was on fire and that the children were inside, we quickly called the fire service station and opened the two gates leading to the street. By the time the first batch arrived, they said there was no water. Later, the state fire service came. They were the ones that put the fire out around 4 am."

By the time the fire subsided, the two upper floors of the three-storey building were completely razed, while six of the occupants, namely Mohammed (22) Aisak (18) Umu (7)

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Usman (5) Aicha (3) and and Kaidia (2) were burnt beyond recognition.

The seventh person, Binta Trame, a 16-year-old girl, was brave enough to jump down from the second floor of the building. She was later taken to the hospital.

The family of 12 who lived in the flat opposite that of the Trame's were lucky to escape unhurt, but they lost everything to fire. "It is painful that the man could not pick even a pin from the flat. I learnt he has been given a room by one of his brothers who live nearby," one of the tenants said.

The news of the tragic occurrence spread to the Guinean and Senegalese nationals in the environment who gathered on Friday and wailed at the sight of their dead compatriots with whom they exchanged greetings as they were retreating into their flats a few hours earlier.

As early as 5.30 am, some officials of Surulere Local Government, led by the chairman, was there to assess the situation. "The chairman gave us his card and said we should contact him later," one of the tenants said.

Some officials of Lagos State Physical Development Authority were also there early to seal off the building and instruct the occupants of the remaining four flats to move out their belongings. "I don't know anybody in Lagos. Where am I going to move my family to now?" one of the tenants wondered.

The officials of the Guinean High Commission in Nigeria were also said to have been contacted over the issue. "The ambassador was here with the protocol officer," Kebe Oumar, the Information Secretary of the Guinean Community in the area said.

The victims' mother, who arrived from her trip in the early hours of Friday was met on the road by sympathisers who led her into the house of Mohammed Ahmed where the news of her children's death was broken to her.

The corpses of the six victims were buried according to Islamic rites at a cemetery in Agege on Friday.

Spokesman of the Lagos State Police Command, also said that the police had been deployed to the house to ensure security and compliance. "But the most important thing now is that Nigerians should know that we are now in harmattan period and so should be extra careful."

Mba advised that people should be careful in handling electrical appliances, candles and other things that could cause fire. "And during this festivities, people should restrain their celebration and intake of alcohol so that reasoning would not be affected. Also people with kids should get older people to stay with them if they have any reason to go out. But the ideal thing is that one of the parent should be around. They should not travel at the same time."

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