

Synagogue: South Africans' death toll now 84

The number of South Africans said to have died in last Friday's Synagogue Church of All Nations' building collapse in Ikotun, Lagos State, has risen to 84.

Pretoria's High Commissioner to Nigeria, Lulu Mnguni, said that the figure could increase.

Mnguni said, "The number has risen from 67 to 84, with more bodies discovered on Thursday. The number of South Africans who were in the church might be higher, as we believe that some people organised the trip themselves without using travel agents."

He said that there were 349 South Africans visiting the church as of the time of the incident.

Mnguni said forensic tests were still to be conducted to verify the identities of the dead.

One of the South Africans survivors in the incident, Khathuatshele Ramovha, 28, described his survival as a miracle.

Ramovha, who has returned to his native South Africa, disclosed in an interview with the *BBC* that he stayed under the rubble for 13 hours before respite finally came.

He said, "It was very dark, people were screaming, people were crying, they were shouting: 'My head' 'my leg.' After some time, some stopped screaming."

The 28-year-old, while stating his desire to visit Prophet T.B Joshua's church again, revealed that a pastor in the church had sounded a strange warning to many of them just before the tragedy occurred.

"He kept saying: 'Uncommon blessing attract uncommon challenges. Be ready for any activity, any danger.' It was like he was encouraging us to be strong.

"But I will go back to Nigeria when I get a chance. The incident has strengthened my faith in T.B. Joshua and his ministry," he said.

A Nigerian, Taiwo Taiwo, also claimed that he spent over 24 hours under the rubble of the collapsed building.

Taiwo was among 131 people pulled from the remains of the guesthouse for foreign followers of Prophet TB Joshua.

Taiwo told reporters in a briefing organised by the church that he was helping Nigerian and South African visitors at the guesthouse, which could accommodate up to 350 people in its dining hall.

He said, "Most of them were actually in the church having a lecture from the Prophet. As people were coming back to have their lunch, I just noticed a sharp sound and I looked up and I all saw was the wall just coming off... like something you see in the movies. It didn't look real.

"Consciously, the (Holy) Spirit said to me, 'This is not normal'. Next thing... it was all dark. People were screaming, shouting. I just kept calm."

Taiwo, who appeared unscathed apart from a bandaged finger, said the incident occurred at about 1:10 pm and he was only pulled out at about 5:05 pm the following day.

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