

September 11th, 2015



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Lone survivor of Lagos fire dies •Victims' relatives cry foul

SEPTEMBER 11, 2015 : SAMSON FOLARIN 10 COMMENTS



The girl being wheeled out

| credits: Samson Folarin

Chidinma, the lone survivor of the Wednesday Lagos fire disaster that claimed a family of seven, is dead.

The eight-year-old girl died on Thursday at the female section of the Trauma and Burns ward of the Gbagada General Hospital, where she was rushed to after the disaster.

PUNCH Metro had reported that seven family members lost their lives after the fire ravaged their apartment on Michael Ogun Street, Obele Lawanson, in the Surulere area of Lagos State.

They were said to have retired to bed on Tuesday night when a fire, suspected to have been ignited by a candle light,

engulfed their room.

The grandma, Mrs. Anthonia Aleh, who had visited to nurse her daughter's newly born child, was burnt to death.

The couple, 28-year-old Kelechi Onoja and 18-year-old Nkiru, and their two children — one-year-and-eight month-old Favour, and a yet-to-be-named baby boy, were choked to death.

Two other family members — 12-year-old Odinaka and 13-year-old Ukamaka — who followed the grandma from the village in Enugu State, also perished in the fire.

The eighth person in the room, Chidinma, was rescued inside the toilet by officials of the Federal Fire Service with burns injuries.

Nkiru's elder brother, Simeon Eze, said Chidinma died on Thursday, adding that the death ended the family's hope of having someone to tell the story of what truly happened.

"She died on Thursday around 6am," Eze said.

PUNCH Metro visited the hospital and observed as her family members waited to take her corpse at the hospital.

A relative said, "The doctor said she had 50-50 chance before. I cannot believe that she is dead. We thought she would survive this. Whoever is behind this will know no peace."

Security officials were invited to calm the situation as argument ensued between the hospital workers and the family about who should be given the corpse.

Around 2pm, the victim was wheeled out on a stretcher and taken to a morgue.

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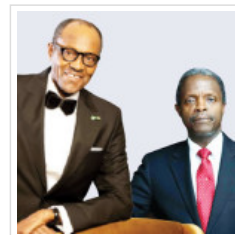
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One of the nurses at the hospital said the victim inhaled smokes which affected her breathing.

A relative, Jude Onuora, said the family was taking the body to the Myyoung Barracks mortuary, where the seven other bodies had been deposited.

He said, "The family will have a meeting and discuss how to take them from there to the village for burial. We want the government to investigate this; we heard it was a deliberate act."

A resident, Christiana Faleti, who witnessed the last moments of Chidinma, said the victim could have been saved, but for the slow response of the doctors at the hospital.

She said, "After she was spotted by the firefighters, we took her to the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, where she was rejected. We later took her to a private hospital before she was taken in an ambulance to the general hospital."

She said at the hospital, the doctors insisted on collecting money before starting the treatment of the victim, adding that it was difficult to raise funds as none of the relatives had been located.

"I had to run back to the community around 3am and started shouting for help. People came out and we raised about N45,000. We took the money to the hospital and that was when the treatment started.

"I was with her at the hospital and when I saw her head swollen, I called the attention of the doctor to it, but he said it was water and that everything would be okay.

"Chidinma was strong. The doctors told me to hold her tightly that the drip must not fall off; I held her as she vibrated. Sometimes, I would call her name, and she would look at me and calm down. She was not supposed to die; but our doctors place more value on money than lives," she added.

Our correspondent visited the residence of the victims and observed that the Lagos State Building Control Agency had already marked the house as distressed.

The community leader, Kareem Awoyemi, told *PUNCH Metro*, the house was a spare part store, before it was converted to a residential building.

He said the five self contained apartments were not well spaced and might have contributed to the high casualty figure.

"I am calling on the government to look critically into what transpired and led to the death of eight people in a single apartment, while the other tenants allegedly slept on. My little investigation showed there was always fight and disagreement in the house," he added.

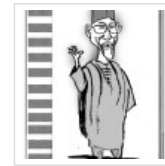
The Police Public Relations Officer, Joe Offor, said he was not aware of Chidinma's death, adding that investigations had commenced on the matter.

He said, "The Divisional Police Officer in Surulere has been on the ground since this incident happened, and I am sure he must have transferred the case to the State Department of Criminal Investigation for thorough investigation. We will be thorough on this and no efforts will be spared."

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