

Lagos building collapse: Death toll hits 35, contractor arrested

March 10, 2016



Scenes of the collapsed building

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Samson Folarin

The death toll in the Lekki Gardens building collapse has risen to 35, after rescue officials brought out the corpses four young men, whose mother was also missing.

As of 4.30pm on Wednesday when our correspondent left Lekki Horizon 1, where the incident happened, officials were still working to bring out more victims.

PUNCH Metro had reported that a five-storey building under construction belonging to Lekki Gardens

had collapsed on Tuesday, killing 18 people.

It was reported that many of the site workers were sleeping when the structure collapsed around 3am.

One more dead body was said to have been recovered late on Tuesday, bringing the casualties to 19.

Emergency workers recovered 15 more corpses on Wednesday, bringing the number of the dead to 34.

Although 13 people were rescued alive and transferred to a hospital on the Lagos Island on Tuesday, a source working with the Lagos State Ambulance Service said one of them died.

He said, "There were 13 people in all that we took to the hospital. But it was unfortunate that one of them died. Not many people know this."

With the development, 35 people have so far lost their lives, while 12 were rescued alive.

Woman missing, four children killed

A Hausa community leader, Awa Hassan, told our correspondent that a woman, Maria, died with her four children.

He identified the children as Yakub, John, Elias and Yohanna.

Hassan said the Hausa community in the area lost about 20 persons to the disaster, appealing to the Lagos State Government to release the corpses for burial in accordance with Islamic rites.

He identified the other casualties as Abbah Alli, Mustapha, Yakub, Yusuf, Yunis, John, Ado, Ibrahim, Johnson, Isiak, Bala, Seidu, Gwani, Buhari and Ali.

He said, "There are about 20 of our people involved in this tragedy. Maria was inside the building with her four children. We have not seen her corpse yet."

Family laments death of brothers

Abbah and Abdullahi had been declared missing since Tuesday.

Thirty-five year-old Abbah, who is married with two children, was said to be speaking with his family while under the rubble, calling for help.

His brother, Athom, told PUNCH Metro, he could have been saved if the emergency workers had responded on time.

He said, "I lost two brothers to this incident – Abbah and Abdullahi.

"Abbah spoke with us from morning till afternoon and said there was a slab on his leg. He picked his calls and begged us to get help.

"They could not save him yesterday (Tuesday). It was this morning that they brought out his corpse and that of Abdullahi. We discovered that Abbah's leg was broken."

James and Chidi Chikodi were among the 12 lucky survivors who made it out alive from the rubble.

The two brothers said they could not explain their escape.

Chidi said, "There were nine of us who slept on the third floor. I cannot explain how we escaped."

Workers fault Lekki Gardens on stoppage of construction

There was anger at the management of Lekki Gardens over its claim that it stopped construction works in January.

The company had in a statement said it had stopped construction work on the building in January. But some workers said they worked till the last minute before the collapse, adding that the construction firm was planning to roof the building before tragedy struck.

A worker, Chiboy Paul, said, "We still worked on Monday and the engineers were there to monitor what we were doing."

Another worker, Charles Johnson, said Lekki Gardens was owing him and his boss N150,000. He said, "They said we should keep working and they would pay."

A resident, Temitope Idowu, explained that the company brought a new set of workers to the site on Monday.

She said the workers, mostly carpenters, who came from Ibadan, Oyo State, were supposed to handle the roofing of the collapsed building.

The workers also faulted the claim by Lekki Gardens that they were not supposed to stay in the building.

Toheeb Bolaji, an iron bender, said since they were expected to work day and night, it was only reasonable for the company to provide them with accommodation.

He added that Lekki Gardens was aware that they slept in the building.

The workers called for full compensation for families of those affected by the disaster.

Mother ill over missing child

A family from Ogun State said on Wednesday that it was looking for a relation, identified as Olayinka Oyeleye.

The 27-year-old was said to have left the Ajah area for Lekki Phase 1 Horizon sometime last week to work.

He was said to have slept in the building on the night and became trapped.

A Red Cross official told PUNCH Metro that his mother suddenly developed an undisclosed medical condition at the scene and they had to treat him.

He said, "She told us he was her first child and she had been looking for him. She developed a problem and we had to stabilise her before she was released."

A relative, Adesanya Olusola, said, "We came from Ijebu Ode and we have been around since 3am. We know he was among the workers because one of his friends who escaped called us from the hospital to inform us."

Another man, Vincent Paul, said he was looking for a friend, Sunday John.

Paul said the 29-year-old, who hails from Benue State, was married with a child, adding that he was seen last on Monday.

“I told him I was going for an outside job and he said he would be staying here to work. I returned on Tuesday to meet this place like this and I have not seen him since,” he added.

A Ghanaian, Emmanuel Semadou, said he was also searching for four of his Togolese friends who worked at the site.

LASEMA releases corpse to family

The corpse of Abbah was the first to be taken away by his family in the Lekki Gardens collapse incident.

Around 3.56pm, the body was given to a representative of the family, Igaji Mohammed, for burial.

The General Manager of LASEMA, Michael Akindele, said the agency had a mandate from the state government to bring out all the corpses.

He said, “Presently, we have recovered 34 corpses. We were able to rescue 13 alive and they are still at the Lagos Island General Hospital, while the dead have been deposited at the Lagos Mainland mortuary.

“As we speak, there are still three excavators that are working. We want to ensure that even if they are dead, we recover them intact.

“The state government is also working with the police to make all necessary arrangements for people to identify their family members, make necessary documentations and take them away for burial.”

The spokesperson for the National Emergency Management Agency, South West zone, Ibrahim Farinloye, said the search-and-rescue operation was ongoing, adding that challenges encountered the previous day had been surmounted.

“We are approaching the ground zero, so we are concluding the aspect of search and rescue.

“However, in emergency management, there is what we call body management and disaster victim identification. We are doing that now. There are just a few people saying they had yet to find their relatives, but maybe before we finish, we will see them,” he added.

Lagos orders directors to submit selves to police

The Lagos State Government has ordered the directors of Lekki Worldwide Estate Limited to submit themselves to the Lagos State Commissioner of Police within 24 hours or face immediate arrest.

In a statement on Wednesday by the Commissioner for Information and Strategy, Mr. Steve Ayorinde, the government said the collapsed building was served contravention notice for exceeding the approved floors and thereafter sealed by the Lagos State Building Control Agency.

The government alleged that “in a brazen act of defiance and impunity, the owners of the building, Messrs Lekki Worldwide Estate Limited, the promoters of Lekki Gardens, criminally unsealed the property and continued building beyond the approved floors until the unfortunate incident of Tuesday which has led to loss of lives”.

It read in part, “The state government has consequently directed the suspension of work at the site and ordered the Lagos State Police Command to cordon it off as it is now a crime scene.

“The government also directed further integrity tests be carried out on every other construction project which has or is currently being handled by Messrs Lekki Worldwide Estate Limited in the interest of public safety.

“Furthermore, the Lagos State Governor, Mr. Akinwunmi Ambode, has strongly advised all directors of Lekki Worldwide Estate Limited to submit themselves to the Lagos State Commissioner of Police within the next 24 hours in their own interest or face immediate arrest.”

Developers shouldn't be trusted with construction

Experts in building construction have said that developers should not be left on their own while constructing houses.

According to them, many of the developers are merely investors who are in business.

The President, Building Collapse Prevention Guild, Mr. Kunle Awobodu, stated that in the Lekki area where the collapse occurred, many of the developers were investors who built without appropriate monitoring from the state government.

He said, "The place where the building was located is a reclaimed land, although the result of the soil integrity test has not been released yet, it is obvious that there was no government agency monitoring the building construction.

"We are not talking of building approval here; we are talking about monitoring the activities of the builders. There is a post construction department under the Lagos State Building Control Agency, how many sites are they monitoring?"

The President, Nigerian Institute of Building, Mr. Tijani Shuaib, stated that developers should not be allowed to construct any building on their own except they had a professional builder.

Similarly, the President, Nigerian Institution of Structural Engineers, Mr. Ore Fadayomi, noted that developers were the biggest problems in the building construction sector.

He said, "They are always in a hurry to make money and so do not often obey basic rules; some of them engage in construction they are not qualified to work on. Even when it is not properly done and a contractor says so, they ignore him."

He said the government needed to do more of regulation and stop their officials from compromising.

The General Manager of LASBCA, Mr. Olusola Adeigbe, said his agency was investigating the incident.

Contractor in police net

The Lagos State Police Command says it has arrested one of the contractors handling the collapsed five-storeyed building.

The spokesperson for the police in Lagos, SP Dolapo Badmus, told one of our correspondents that the contractor, Odofin Taiwo, was picked up on Wednesday in Lagos.

She said, "He is culpable and under investigation. We are also on the trail of the owners of Lekki Gardens."

Additional reports by: Sesan Olufowobi, Maureen Ihua-Maduenyi and Afeez Hanafi

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