

Sergeant, visitor die as Lagos police college building collapses

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Rescue workers at the site of a collapsed building at the Police College Barracks, Ikeja, Lagos

Afeez Hanafi

A police sergeant, who lived in Highway Barracks, Police College, Ikeja, Lagos, and his visitor lost their lives on Sunday after the toilet and the staircase of the building collapsed.

PUNCH Metro learnt that the policeman, identified simply as Danjuma, and his visitor, whose name had yet to be ascertained, were about to have their bath around 4.30am when the structure fell on them.

It was gathered that the occupants of the barracks had been warned to vacate the distressed two-storeyed building by the police authorities, but they declined on the grounds that they did not have the means to relocate.

When our correspondent arrived at the scene around 11am, residents were seen salvaging their property as officials of the National Emergency Management Agency and the Lagos State Emergency Management Agency prepared to completely demolish the building.

One of the residents, Mrs. Jenifa Mattias, said she was woken up by the sound of the collapse, adding that Danjuma moved into the barracks about five months ago.

She said, "He was a gentleman. He was transferred to Lagos recently and lived alone. I don't know whether the visitor was his friend or relative. But they wanted to bathe when the toilet fell on them.

"We have been told to pack out, but we refused to leave because we have nowhere to go. But now that this has happened, I know God will make a way."

An eyewitness, Hussain Abam, said efforts to rescue the victims alive proved abortive.

"It took some time before we were able to break the slabs that covered them and bring them out. The visitor was a civilian; he arrived here yesterday," he added.

A tailor, Mikail Afolabi, lamented the bad state of the buildings in the barracks and called on the government to renovate them.

He said, "These structures are weak. I cried when I saw the corpses. It was very unfortunate, especially on a day like this when people are celebrating."

A policeman, who lives in a building opposite the collapsed structure, blamed the dilapidation of the buildings in the barracks on the police authorities.

The cop, who gave his name simply as John, said, "Every month, N7,500 is deducted from each policeman's salary and now, we were told to leave on or before Wednesday. Where do they want us to go? Where is the money they have been deducting from our salaries? They did not renovate the barracks. We have no place to go."

The Lagos State Commissioner of Police confirmed the death, Fatai Owoseni, saying efforts had been made to renovate the barracks.

He said, "The funds that are available to the government and the police are used to upgrade the facilities from time to time. When an incident like this happens, it calls for us to reassess and test the integrity of the buildings; and from there we move on.

"It is not possible to house every policeman in the barracks. Some policemen have to live within the communities they are."

The NEMA spokesperson, South-West zone, Ibrahim Farinloye, stated that integrity test would be conducted on all the buildings in the barracks.

The LASEMA General Manager, Mr. Adesina Tiamiyu, said bodies of the victims had been deposited in the Mainland Hospital's morgue.

He said, "The agency received a distress call about a collapsed building in Highway Police Barracks opposite Area F, Ikeja. According to investigation conducted by the agency's officials at the scene, it was gathered that the toilets and stairway of Wing D collapsed at about 4am.

"The agency's officials, in collaboration with men of the Lagos State Fire Service, Nigeria Police (highway patrol) and NEMA, recovered the bodies of two dead adult males. We have commenced the demolition of the affected building."

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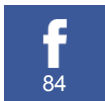
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