

# Death of our children hard to cope with

## Time has yet to heal the wounds of the parents of the five pupils of Victory Schools, Kaduna, who drowned a year ago while on an excursion, writes BABATUNDE MUSA

**T**HOUGH it's a year ago that tragedy hit the households of some parents of the pupils of Victory Schools, Kaduna, when five of them drowned during an excursion, the agonies have yet to cease.

Our correspondent, who visited the parents of the pupils in their separate abode on Thursday, discovered that they were still in anguish which left them in sober state.

Precisely on October 11, 2017, some of the school's pupils, located in Angwan Yelwa, in the Chikun Local Government Area of the state, drowned in the Kaduna River while on an excursion to a waterworks.

The boat they were travelling in capsized. While four of them were rescued alive, five drowned. The bodies of the deceased pupils were later recovered and deposited at the Saint Gerald Catholic Hospital in Kaduna.

The deceased were Joseph Benedict, Monday Umanyi, Priscillia Romanus, David Ukaegbu and Goodness Arogundade.

One of the parents of the deceased, Mr Unuomogwe Benedict, recalled how he wept bitterly the day he received the news of the death of his son, Joseph.

He told *SUNDAY PUNCH* that he was yet to come to terms with the incident despite the fact that it occurred almost a year ago.

According to him, it has not been easy coping with the situation as the day always elicits sadness.

He said, "The family has been praying about it. We mostly discuss about our son at home especially how he used to be funny in the way he handled things. It has not been easy living without him. We always keep his memories alive and he will continue to be remembered."

Benedict said though the family accepted that the incident was an act of God, it would be unfair if the federal and state governments swept the matter under



•Joseph



•David



•Priscillia



•Monday

the carpet.

"Recall that President Muhammadu Buhari has requested that the matter be investigated. We have yet to hear anything

since then. I just want the government to look into the matter and address our plight," he said.

Another parent of one of the dead pupils,

Mr Onuigbo Romanus, said the family had continued living with the trauma of losing their only daughter, Priscilla.

Romanus added that the loss had created a vacuum in the family. He said, "It has not been easy coping with the loss. The trauma is still in the mother's face but I always console her. My family is still waiting to hear from the government as promised."

The state government set up a committee to investigate the incident but the report had yet to be made public.

It was gathered that the affected parents had concluded plans to hold a peaceful protest at the Government House, Kaduna, on October 11, 2018, marking a year of the incident, to seek the attention of the government on the matter.

The parents, in a letter to Buhari, a copy of which was obtained by *SUNDAY PUNCH*, pleaded with the President to intervene in the matter by requesting the report of a committee he ordered to be set up to investigate the cause of the tragedy.

Pitiably, Mr Henry Umanyi, who is the father of Monday, was short of words when our correspondent visited him.

He said there was no way he could forget his beloved son, adding that it was not easy living without his son. "We remember him every day. The pain of losing him is hard to let go," he said.

On his part, the late Goodness' father, Pastor Abiodun Arogundade, said he would rather place everything in God's hands even though the incident was hard to forget.

Arogundade added, "My family is not ready to take issue with the government or the school because God knows the best. I know that the case is hard to let go but I have decided to leave everything to God."

Another father, Basil Ukaegbu, whose only son, David, was among the deceased pupils, said his family was going through difficult times.

## Demand panel report, affected parents tell Buhari

The parents of the drowned pupils have appealed to Buhari to demand the report of the panel he said should be set up to investigate the matter.

The parents stated this in a letter titled, 'Affected parents of drowned students of Victory Schools', signed by Benedict and Umanyi.

The parents urged the President to recall that it had been about a year that they lost their children to the tragic river incident.

The letter read in part, "Further recall that Mr. President directed that the tragic incident be expeditiously investigated and a comprehensive report forwarded to him with a view to knowing the cause of the incident. The directive of Mr. President

has yet to be complied with and we, the affected parents and the general public, have waited patiently without response from the relevant authorities.

"It is pertinent to mention that the Education Director of Sabo Zonal office, Mr. Joshua Ayuba, called the affected parents on March 28, 2018 and promised that actions would be expedited to see the state Commissioner for Education, Alhaji Ja'afaru Sani, which he promptly did on April 3, 2018."

The parents said about five days later, the commissioner granted them audience and promised that in three days, the state governor, Mallam Nasir El-Rufai, would meet with them.

"Unfortunately, the affected parents have

yet to receive a word from the zonal education director, commissioner and governor. Your Excellency, we are your subjects and very law-abiding. We also believe that this government is very responsible, and as such, believes in the sanctity of human life and in the infallible more than the dead. We believe that this government has the full intentions and capacity to dispose of this case but there could probably be a gap in the transmission of the investigative report to the appropriate authorities," they noted.

According to them, the school management has tried by awarding a scholarship slot to a family member of the affected families from nursery to secondary level and for that they believe it has done well in trying to alleviate their plights.

They further said they wrote the open letter since the incident would be a year next Wednesday and wanted to remind the President and the state governor of their promises to get to the root of the matter.

The letter added, "The state Commissioner for Education, said, 'This government is a responsible government and we will not do anything that will cause an embarrassment to it'. Thus, we wouldn't have used this medium to communicate to you. We have to use it because we are left with no option since we cannot find our way into Aso Rock Presidential Villa or the state Government House."

They, however, stated that they hoped that the President would address their cries so that the issue could be laid to rest.