

14-year-old electrocuted while operating Chinese firm's faulty machine

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• Entrance to the company • The protesters Photos: Oluwatosin Omojuyigbe

Oluwatosin Omojuyigbe

Workers at a Lagos-based footwear company, Cheng-Fa Nigeria Limited, on Friday, protested the death of their colleague, Joseph Ekwenobe, who was allegedly electrocuted while pouring materials into a faulty machine belonging to the firm.

The workers said they had complained about the faulty machine to the management in the past but nothing was done about it, adding that the death of 14-year-old Joseph was unnecessary.

They accused the management of being indifferent to the plight of the workers, saying that the machine developed a fault three days earlier and had electrocuted some workers before killing Joseph.

The workers, who lamented the poor working condition in the firm, also complained about their take home pay, which they noted was nothing compared to the number of hours they put.

One of the workers, who spoke on condition of anonymity, noted that the management did nothing to revive Joseph when the incident happened.

He said, “I was inside the factory when I heard that someone was electrocuted and I saw everybody running helter-skelter. I went there and saw that it was one of my colleagues, who was electrocuted, nobody was able to touch him until the generator had been switched off.

“Our Chinese bosses did not attend to him despite knowing what happened; they all went inside and we were the ones who tried to resuscitate him for more than 30 minutes till the driver came and took him away, only for us to hear later that he had died.”

Another worker, who identified himself simply as Olaniyi, said, “We have been complaining that the machine was electrocuting workers and the general supervisor told the engineer, who came to test it, but it was still the same till today (Friday) that the boy (Joseph) went to use it and we heard a noise and everybody rushed there and saw that he was already dead.

“They (owners of the firm) don’t care about our welfare in this company. We work for 18 hours without rest and they pay us meagre amounts and if you complain, you will be laid off. There is no first aid box; if you complain about sickness, you will only be given paracetamol.”

One of the workers, Segun Arowolo, alleged that their Chinese boss, who was simply identified as Mr Ten, was not concerned about the incident.

He said, “These Chinese men are wicked; we had told them before that the machine was faulty but they did not answer us until today (Friday) that the boy wanted to pour materials into it and he was electrocuted and died immediately. The guy was left unattended to until his colleagues gathered to resuscitate him.

“One of the Chinese, called Mr Ten, was standing, looking at us and smoking without making any effort to revive Joseph. They maltreat workers here; any little mistake, they will slap, beat or sack us.”

When *PUNCH Metro* contacted the deceased’s family, his brother, Precious Ekwenobe, said Joseph had to work in the company to raise money for his West African Senior School Certificate

Examination, adding that the deceased was to travel out of the country to meet their sister.

He said, “I received a call that my brother fainted and I rushed down to the company, only for me to see a lot of people gathered and I was told that he was electrocuted by a machine in the company.

“Anytime he came back from the factory, he used to complain of body pain and how the workers were being maltreated in the factory. He went to work there because my dad was having some financial problems.

“Joseph was supposed to write the WASSCE this year but because there was no money, he had to drop out of school to hustle for money so that he could register for next year’s examination. He was supposed to travel to Austria to meet our sister, who had promised that she would help him to further his study there.”

However, when our correspondent contacted the company, the legal counsel, who refused to give his name, insisted that Joseph was alive and receiving treatment in an undisclosed hospital.

He said, “There was a factory accident, which involved a young boy and led to unrest because he was injured. After that, the management rushed the boy to hospital, where he is receiving treatment.

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“The management of the company has met with the representatives of the staff and has agreed that their salaries will be paid on Monday (today). The company does not have the habit of owing salaries. The concern of the company is the welfare of the staff. The management of the company is currently working in unity with the officials of the Nigeria Police Force.”

Precious, however, told our correspondent on Sunday that his brother did not survive the accident, but gave up the ghost on Friday.

When contacted, the Lagos State Command’s Police Public Relations Officer, Bala Elkana, who confirmed the incident, said investigation had commenced.

“We have a case of a boy who was electrocuted in a company and the matter was reported at the Area ‘F’. Investigation is ongoing on the matter,” he said.

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