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# Lagos: Three die, nine injured in building collapse, two years after demolition order

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**Published** [July 12, 2020](#)**AFEEZ HANAFI**

Feelings ran high on Saturday after a three-storey building on Freeman Street, Lagos Island, collapsed on a bungalow beside it, trapping many occupants.

Three persons – a policewoman attached to the Ikoyi Police Station and two kids aged four and seven – were killed while nine others sustained injuries.

*Sunday PUNCH* learnt that the affected dwellers were around 2am awoken by a loud crack from the building which came down before they could all run to safety.

While the policewoman and the four-year-old boy popularly called Paulo lived in the storey building, the seven-year-old boy, Abdulsalam Balogun, resided in the bungalow with his family.

A youth resident in the bungalow, Gabriel Allison, said screams of neighbours jolted him from sleep.

He said, “Luckily I was able to escape; I can’t explain how I raced outside. The three storey building was marked by the government about two years ago and sealed initially. After some time, we saw the building being renovated. They did some patches and let it out to new tenants. It collapsed around 2am and fell on our bungalow.”

Abdulsalam’s father, Ibrahim Balogun, told our correspondent that he struggled to rescue his son but was helpless as he could not lift a pillar that fell on the boy.

He stated that the family was devastated by the death of Abdulsalam whom he described as an intelligent and friendly child.

He said, “While I was struggling to rescue my son, there was an electric shock and I could hardly move. I eventually managed to fight it off but a pillar had fallen on my child. I could not lift it up because I had fractured my left hand. I watched him writhing in pain but could not help. By the time he was rescued, he had died. It was painful.

“The storey building was weak and had cracks. Tenants living there usually complained. Some government officials had come to inspect it more than once. I don’t know why they left it.”

The elder sister of the deceased, Balogun Salamat, 17, was in tears and inconsolable. She cried uncontrollably as she narrated the moment the tragedy struck.

“Around 2am, our neighbours alerted us to come out that the building beside us was about to collapse. As soon as we reached outside, everything came down. My dad and my brother were inside. After some time, my dad came out. My brother could not make it. He was in Primary 2,” she stated amid tears.

A tailor, Rukayat Oyebanji, whose shop was in front of the bungalow, said she noticed that one of the pillars of the storey building was crumbling on Friday when she visited a tenant identified simply as Iya Samuel, who lived there.

Oyebanji said she was informed about the collapse around 3am, lamenting that three shops, including hers, were destroyed.

She said, “I exclaimed when I saw the pillar of the building already pulled out. I warned her (Iya Samuel) that the building could collapse soon. I advised her not to sleep there again and I quickly left. Officials from the Lagos State Government had come to inspect the building several times. They ought to have demolished it long time ago but they did not take any action probably because they have been bribed.

“It was around 3am that I got a call that it had collapsed and it affected my shop. All my machines were trapped. Several clothes belonging to my colleague’s customers were all destroyed. Iya Samuel, her son and her husband sustained injuries.”

Mr Taofiq Olaonipekun, whose wife operated a canteen on the ground floor of the collapsed building, said they could not salvage any item from the rubble.

He said a tenant, well known as Uncle (a teacher), lost his four-year-old son – Paulo.

An elder in the community, Mr Bola Hassan, urged the government to closely monitor developers building houses on Lagos Island.

“Many of them don’t use quality materials. Lives are more important than the money they (developers) are looking for. Also, once a house is marked, the government should take action on it,” he said.

The Chief Imam, Mogaji Central Mosque on Freeman Street, Abdulrahman Mogaji, stated that he expected the government to have chased the people living in the building.

“I learnt it was a developer who had been collecting rent since then. All the houses on that street need to undergo test,” he added.

While giving an update on the incident, LASEMA General Manager, Dr Olufemi Oke-Osanyitolu, stated that in the incident three casualties were recorded while nine persons rescued.

He said, “Upon arrival at the incident scene at 4.05am, a three-storey building was discovered to have totally collapsed on people asleep inside. Nine victims have been extricated from the rubble alive while three bodies were recovered dead. Their remains were transported to the mortuary by SEHMU while pre hospital care has been administered to the nine victims by LASEMA and LASAMBUS.”

The spokesperson for the police in the state, SP Bala Elkana, identified one of the deceased as a policewoman.

The General Manager, Lagos State Building Control Agency, Mrs Biola Kosegbe, said property owners and tenants frustrated the agency's efforts most times by employing delay tactics to prevent the demotion of marked buildings.

Kosegbe, who denied allegation that officials were compromised, stated that some landlords would plaster markings on distressed buildings to subvert the efforts of the agency.

She stated, "Since they are saying the property was marked two years ago, it means it had already been identified as a distressed property. However, people can be sentimental about things. We have identified over 500 abandoned and distressed property, especially on Lagos Island where we have the highest number of such properties. We have served a lot of them (landlords) and told them to bring the structural assessment of their buildings.

"Some of them in the middle of the night, they would put plaster over the markings. There was no evidence that building was marked which means they must have plastered the markings. On Thursday, we advertised in *The PUNCH* over 100 properties and we gave the owners seven days' notice. Last year, government removed about 45 properties. The process takes time.

"For people residing in a property, once it is marked, they need to take note and ensure that the owner do the needful by getting a certified structural engineer to assess the property. There are several instances whereby both the tenants and the owner will take us to court as a delay tactic to prevent us from doing our job.

"The general public won't know what is going on. All they know is that we have marked the property and we are yet to remove it. If that property collapses tomorrow, they will say LASBCA marked the property, yet they refuse to remove it. Thus, they would say money has exchanged hands which is not true.

