

# Chinese restaurant's manager, four other workers die, Filipino injured in Lagos explosion

*Tobi Aworinde and Percy Ani 19 June 2021*

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Burnt vehicles at the OPIC Plaza. Photo: Bimpe Olajiga

Anxious family members stormed the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital on Friday in search of their loved ones, following a gas explosion in Ikeja that claimed five lives, while nine, including a Filipino, sustained injuries.

The tanker, conveying liquefied petroleum gas on the ever-busy Mobolaji Bank Anthony Way around 10pm on Thursday, spilled its flammable content into nearby OPIC Shopping Plaza, beside Sheraton Lagos Hotel.

Two businesses situated in the plaza, New China Restaurant and Oasis Supermarket, suffered extensive property damage with about 22 burnt vehicles sighted in the parking lot of the plaza.

According to eyewitnesses, most of the casualties were workers at the Chinese restaurant. Our correspondents observed that the restaurant occupies the rear of the four-storey building, downhill from the gate.

The acting Coordinator of the Lagos Territorial Office, National Emergency Management Agency, Mr Ibrahim Farinloye, who spoke to one of our correspondents at the scene of the explosion, stated that NEMA got an alert and resolved the crisis by 3.50am.

Farinloye said, "There was a problem with an LPG tanker, which started somewhere in Maryland. They said there was a leakage, so those who were following the vehicle said there was a leakage. They were trying to contact emergencies but they couldn't (establish contact). When they got to this spot, the valve separated.

"Because of the elevated position of the tanker, all of the content leaked out. All LPG tankers are imported. They are not fabricated in Nigeria, so this incident was not expected. There are five dead victims and 11 rescued alive. Two of them died in the hospital; three were recovered here. They sustained burns."

He added that the tanker driver and motor boy ran away, saying the incident would have been better managed if the highway was cleared.

"Vehicles were moving and with the vehicular movement, people ought to have parked away when they saw the gas explosion, but they continued moving," Farinloye said.

A slicer at the affected restaurant identified only as Godwin told one of our correspondents that he was off-duty when the incident occurred, adding that he lived behind the restaurant.

He said, "Around 11, I heard the double explosions from my apartment. The whole building was shaking. I had to hurriedly take my wife and two kids and run away from the explosion. The leaked liquid gas had spread from the tanker into the kitchen and when it was ignited, it caused the explosion of the gas used by the kitchen."

Godwin noted that a pregnant woman, during the rush to escape the fire in the plaza, fell and was trampled on by others. "Luckily, she did not lose her pregnancy but sustained bodily injuries," he added.

According to him, the manager died while trying to escape the gas explosion with a Filipino worker and a driver.

He said, "When the manager, the Filipino worker and the driver tried driving away to safety, the gas from the restaurant used for cooking also got ignited and exploded. The explosion was so strong, it pushed the vehicle they were riding in away and the manager and driver died. However, he said the Filipino worker might survive."

Godwin described the manager, whom he had worked with “for a long time,” as a wonderful boss.

One of the security guards at the plaza, identified simply as Abdullahi, stated that the explosion happened between 10pm and 11pm.

According to him, the contents of the tanker, which was parked in front of Sheraton, suddenly started spilling into the plaza.

Abdullahi said, “As it was entering the plaza, the Chinese people were cooking with flames, so there was an explosion. When it exploded, everybody in the building, including me, started to run. I ran to the road and that was how we escaped. The gas leaked all the way to the kitchen. One of our night guards was also affected.

“The manager, Mr Balogun, and one of his cooks died. A furniture worker, Mr Suleiman, also died. The deceased were gentle and kind. When the manager’s wife came in, she was crying. He has three children and he has been working there for 15 years.”

Another guard, Solomon, who said he had worked at plaza for four years, described one of the victims as a part-time student of the University of Lagos who “did the job to support himself.”

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He added, “A female staff member also got burnt. The manager who lost his life was a black man. There was another person they called Suleiman. He was a carpenter with the Chinese restaurant. The carpenter and manager were burnt to death.

“Then there is another staff member that worked in the kitchen whom we called Igwe. He was also burnt to death. They were friendly. I was not there when it happened. But when I came in and I saw the manager, I shed tears. All of them were lovely people. Since I started working here, I have known them as loving people. I saw the wife of the manager this morning. His brother, who resembles him, was also here. When they saw the bodies, on their way out, I was trying to console them.”

Solomon noted that the fire began from the Chinese restaurant after the gas had leaked from the tanker.

“When the leaked gas reached the restaurant, the fire was ignited and it travelled back to the tanker. Most of my colleagues working the night shift managed to escape with the help of the police. They called policemen and other people, but the fire service didn’t respond in time.

“When I was called, I tried contacting them (fire service) but the number just kept ringing. It was the Sheraton policemen that came to support the security men that were on the ground,” he added.

When our correspondents visited Lagos State University Teaching Hospital in Ikeja, a doctor in the Burns Unit, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said 14 victims were brought in.

He said, “The ages of the victims are between 23 and 53. Three of them were transferred to Gbagada and nine of them were brought here. There were four women and the others were men. They were all Nigerians except for one

Asian. Presently, there were three who have been declared dead. They had severe burns. We had to resuscitate the other 12 and they are under intensive care. They were brought in around 11.30pm.”

*City Round* saw three women of Asian descent and about 20 Nigerians at the LASUTH Burns Unit awaiting their loved ones.