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Pregnant woman, two infants, six others die in Rivers jetty fire

Dennis Naku 12 April 2022

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No fewer than nine persons, including a pregnant woman and two infants, on Monday, lost their lives in a fire incident at the Bonny-Bille-Nembe Jetty in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Also, about 60 passenger boats were destroyed in the fire, which began around 2am when residents woke up to see the inferno.

Eyewitnesses said some of the victims were burnt beyond recognition, even as the police said they had begun investigation to ascertain the cause of the fire.

An eyewitness, who did not want to be identified, said the fire started when some persons were trying to off-load illegally refined petroleum products, known as Kpofire, after transporting the products across the water.

The witness said, "They have warned these people not to carry diesel and fuel inside boats. Many people died, including a pregnant woman and a baby. Around 2am, I and my friend came out after we heard an explosion. Some people were sleeping."

Another eyewitness, who gave her name as Ebi, claimed that 30 people died in the inferno.

"For the boats that got burnt, we can't even count them," she added.

A woman, who escaped with her two children but lost her five-month-old child, said she jumped into the river.

"We were surprised when we saw a large fire and people started running. I called the manager to help me rescue this child I am carrying, but he didn't answer me, so I carried one of them and jumped inside the river.

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“They entered the river and brought my other child. But I told them that my youngest child was still inside. They didn’t see that one,” she stated.

Another grieving woman said she went out to buy something only to return to see the fire, adding that her two-year-old son was missing.

The fire was later put out by a team of firemen deployed in the scene.

The state Commissioner for Special Duties, Emeka Onowu, confirmed the incident.

He said, “Between seven to nine people died. The government has ordered those who have makeshift structures in the area to vacate within two weeks.”

The acting spokesman for the state police command, Grace Iringe-Koko, also confirmed the incident.

“Yes, we are aware of the fire. But we are still trying to get the exact casualty figure,” she said.

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