

Probe begins as one dies in Rivers building collapse

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By Dennis Naku

The collapsed building

The Rivers State Police Command has launched a full scale investigation into the cause of a collapsed building that claimed one life in the Ogbogoro community in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of the state, *PUNCH Metro* gathered.

Our correspondent who visited the incident scene learnt that one person was confirmed dead after a two-storey building under construction collapsed on Monday in the Egbelu Mgbaraja area of Ogbogoro.

This came about one week after a three-storey building, also under construction, collapsed at Iriebe in the same Obio/Akpor LGA though no life was lost in that incident.

But on the latest tragedy, an eyewitness identified as Jonathan Obey told our correspondent that the two-storey building caved in while workers were on duty on the second floor at about 2 pm on Monday claiming the life of one of them.

Obey disclosed that the victim was a young man simply identified as Udeme from Akwa Ibom State, pointing out that another worker escaped death by the whisker but not without severe injuries.

According to him, “So, when we came here, we discovered that they used sub-standard materials on the building.

“As we speak, someone is trapped inside. When we first came, we tried to see how we could rescue the person but we couldn’t.

“After some assessment, we found out that the foundation was a two-storey building. However, some of the rods were of low quality and the decking had no centre pillar.”

Furthermore, he said, “It was supposed to have a centre beam and a pillar in the middle. And the casting of the first decking didn’t have enough cement. So, a lot of things happened and I would say that is what caused the building collapse.”

Meanwhile, the state Commissioner for Physical Planning and Urban Development, Evans Bipi, has ordered the sealing off of the site and declared the property developer wanted over the tragic incident.

Bipi during an on-the-spot visit to the scene accused the property developer of gross negligence for building without approval and the use of sub-standard materials leading to an avoidable death.

He stated, “We have said if you build without government approval and you are caught in that act, you will certainly go in for it.

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“This place, of course, has been sealed and we have declared the owner wanted because life was truly lost. We want to see him (property owner) and question why he was using sub-standard materials.

“Look at what has happened. For a two-storey building, you are using a 12MM rod and it will interest you to know that even the property did not have approval.”

Continuing, Bipi said, “This is something the government will not tolerate. We must use him as a guinea pig.”

A statement issued on Tuesday morning by the media aide to the commissioner, Emeka Idika Kalu, said his principal described the tragedy as one too many and sympathised with the family of the victim after his remains were pulled out of the rubble.

“But this must serve as a warning to people who build without approval,” he said.

Also, the Commissioner for Special Duties, Samuel Anya, expressed sadness over the loss of life and accused the developer of prioritising profit over the safety of the workers and prospective tenants.

Anya said, “We are not happy because we came here and saw the poor quality job being done. To crown it all, there was no building approval, and now, somebody is dead.

“If you are building, you must have a building plan so that the Ministry of Urban Development will approve your building plan before you can go.

“The owner and the engineer must be brought to book because lives are very important to the government.”

When contacted, the spokesperson for the state police command, Grace Iringe-Koko, confirmed the incident and the death of a worker at the site.

She said, “Yes, the command is aware of the incident. One person died.

“We know that the Commissioner for Physical Planning and Urban Development has visited the scene. But we have launched an investigation into the incident to ascertain the cause of the incident because it is becoming one too many.”