

## NEWS

# Tragedy in Anambra: 25 worshipers die in stampede

From **EMMANUEL UZOR** and **ALOY-SIUS ATTAH, Onitsha**

**N**o fewer than 25 persons lost their lives in the early hours of yesterday in a stampede at the monthly adoration crusade organised by Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Obinma of the Holy Ghost Adoration Ministry for prayers and healing at Uke in Anambra State.

The stampede was attributed to the unprecedented crowd at the prayer ground. Sunday Sun gathered from eyewitnesses that the victims died of exhaustion.

Anambra State Governor, Peter Obi, and the governorship candidate of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Chief Willie Obiano, were among the dignitaries that attended the event. But the duo had left before the tragedy happened. Eyewit-

nesses told *Sunday Sun* that Obi addressed the worshipers and promised to sponsor 20 persons on pilgrimage to Israel as well as provide a better place of worship.

"The last Friday all-night prayer was the largest. I have not seen the magnitude of crowd I saw since the history of this ministry. Maybe it was because it fell on All Saints' Day, which Catholics regard as a holy day of obligation. So, many people didn't open their shops and that was why the crowd was too much. It is possible that the cause of these deaths was stampede and exhaustion which occurred when people started struggling to leave the venue," one of the eyewitnesses said.

Emeka Ilodiuba from Nnokwa in Idemili South council area of Anambra State who lost his wife in the incident, gave the account of the tragic event saying "I came

with my wife Ebube Muonso. When the prayer ended about 5.30 am, we stood to go home. Before then, the governor and his entourage had left. But when we got to the entrance, there was unprecedented crowd trying to get out of the prayer ground. The crowd surged forward and that was when my wife fell down and people fell on top of her till she died."

He maintained that the presence of Obi and Obiano at the prayer ground had nothing to do with the incident and called on the security agencies to thoroughly investigate the major cause of the stampede that claimed the lives of the innocent worshipers.

Another eyewitness said trouble started shortly after the event, when a group of people behaving like paid agents started shouting "Fire, fire, fire" which made peo-

ple to scamper for safety.

It is believed that the commotion was deliberately orchestrated by some people who learnt that Governor Peter Obi would visit the place. But the governor had quietly left the venue before the incident happened.

The unprecedented crowd was attributed to the fact that the adoration fell on All Saints' Day, which was the first day of the month (Friday) when many people usually gather for worship.

When informed about the tragedy, Governor Obi cancelled all his scheduled engagements for Saturday and rushed the scene to assess the situation. He described the incident as a national calamity that took the entire state by surprise.

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