

Harvest of casualties: Police save court building from irate youths

•As court fence collapses, kills 3,
injured many

BY GILBERT EKEZIE

It was hell let loose at Oguntokun and Baale Streets in Ilasamaja community, Oshodi Isolo Local Government Area of Lagos State last Saturday as the Customary Court B fence collapsed and killed three people and left many injured.

The incident which occurred at about 6 pm took the residents by surprise and caused uproar as irate youths attempted to destroy the court building. Their grouse was that the fence had been in a bad condition for decades. However, it took the intervention of the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) of Ilasamaja Police Station, Ochogwu Ogbeh (CSP) and his men to prevent the aggrieved youths from destroying the building.

Among the dead were Master Emmanuel Nwafor, a.k.a. 'Bobo,' a 10-year old primary four pupil of Emmanuel Private School, Ilasamaja whose parents live on No. 3, Oguntokun Street, Ilasamaja; a 49 year old woman, Mrs Eugenia Obianeri of No. 2, Oguntokun Street and an unidentified girl. Those who sustained injuries include two siblings, Ronke Odejobi, a 12-year old JSS 1 Student and her younger brother, Malik Odejobi and others whose identities are yet to be ascertained.

Master Nwafor was said to have been sent on an errand by a neighbour and immediately he ran out in front of their residence which is very close to the fence, he met his death. The fence hit him, and he died on the spot. Mrs Obianeri was said to have gone to dry her clothes on a rope tied to the fence and immediately she finished and turned back to leave, the fence hit her from the back and she fell inside a drain. Her legs were smashed and she sustained serious injuries on other parts of her body. She died the following day at the General Hospital, Lagos Island.

The little girl who was not identified at the spot was passing by when the fence collapsed and trapped her and she died instantly.

Some of the survivors, Miss Ronke and Master Malik Odejobi, were in front of their mothers shop at No 2 Oguntokun Street when the fence fell and hit them. Their mother, Mrs Monsurat Odejobi, who was in the shop rescued them. According to her, "when I heard the sound, I ran out and saw my children trapped and managed to rescue them. Had it been I was not around when the incident happened, my children would have died because before people could have come to their rescue, the wall would have pressed them to death." Father of

one of the deceased, Herbert Nwafor, a native of Amazu Ifakala in Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State told *Crime Watch* that the incident happened barely one week after he packed into the apartment. He explained that on the day of the incident, he went to his former residence with Emmanuel to pick some of their property and when they finished doing that, they returned, took their baths, ate and relaxed for some hours before he left to pay a visit to one of his kinsmen living within the area. "While at the place, one of my daughters called me on phone that Bobo has died. Surprised and shocked at the information, I rushed home to meet the body of my only son, shattered by the debris of fallen wall."

Nwafor explained that the DPO of Ilasamaja, Ochogwu Ogbeh, a CSP and his men were at the scene and took the body of Emmanuel to the Lagos State Teaching Hospital Mortuary. "When the police assisted in depositing body of my son at the mortuary, some officials of the Local Government and other people visited my family in the presence of some of my kinsmen and advised that he should be buried. After much discussion with my kinsmen, we agreed that he should be buried. But they assured that they would pay me another visit in three day's time when the tension would have been over. But they did not come as promised."

His wife, Mrs Ada Nwafor also expressed shock and agony over the death of her son and wonder why such should happen to her. "I cannot explain what has happened to me. Though I have other children, but Bobo is my only son after eight pregnancies, now death has collected him from me. What do I do? Is it for me to get pregnant again?"

Mr Peter Obianeri from Agwa in Oguta Local Government Area of Imo State was also angry and depressed when he witnessed what led to the death of his wife, Eugenia. "That thing you are looking at is what killed my wife (pointing at the debris). I was sitting in front of our house with some of my children and my wife came out from the room to dry clothes on the rope tied to the fence. Immediately she finished and turned to enter the room, the wall fell on her from behind and smashed two of her legs. Two of my children were also affected, but their cases are not as serious as my wife's. So, we took her to the hospital and she was attended to and we returned home hoping to go to the hospital the following day. In the night, she was restless and early in the morning, they attended to her. While we were at the hospital, she complained to me that her heart was trying to knock. Before I could report to the doctors,



• The late Mrs. Obianeri



• One of the victims, Ronke



• The late Emmanuel

she died."

Meanwhile, Ronke and her brother Malik are presently receiving treatment at the General Hospital, Isolo. Their mother, Mrs Monsurat Adejobi expressed concern over the bill being incurred for the treatment of the victims and called on the government to come to her aid. "Since this thing happened to my children, I have been responsible for their hospital bills and it has really weighed me down. The Government and the Management of the court has not even paid me a visit. Therefore, I call on them to support me to save my children.

"We learnt that since over thirty years of constructing the building, there has not been any maintenance on it and the residents had been raising alarm over the cracked fence but no action was taken. A resident, Pastor Luke blamed the incident on the Local Government and Management of the Court who fail to repair the wall after several complaints.