

NEWS PLUS

Tears flow in Anambra community

... As vehicle crushes 6 school kids

FROM EMMANUEL UZOR, ONITSHA

"Oh God! Not again!" These were the words of agony that escaped from the lips of a woman, identified as Ngozi, as she was told of the death of her daughter. Her child was one of the six students of Community Secondary School, Umuokpu Awka crushed to death at Umuokpu Awka, along the old Onitsha-Enugu Expressway recently.

It was a normal school day. Normal school activities had ended and students of the Community Secondary School, Umuokpu Awka and Union Secondary School, Amawbia had left their respective schools without any premonition of evil.

However, unknown to the students and everyone in the area, death was lurking around the corner. Six students from the schools were crushed to death with many sustaining varying degrees of injuries when a Toyota Camry car lost control and rammed into the bus stop just opposite the compound of the former Speaker of Anambra State House of Assembly, Chief Anayo Nebe. The car crushed the school children, killing them on the spot.

Daily Sun also gathered that market women and other road users were not spared by the vehicle which caused considerable havoc in the community. It was gathered that the driver of the ill fated vehicle who could not be found at the scene of the accident hurriedly packed his belongings in the wrecked vehicle and vanished from the scene.

Though there was no official report of the cause of the accident, eyewitnesses informed the reporter that the driver was making a call on his mobile phone when he

suddenly lost control of the car, forcing it to skid off the road. The car then ran into the school children who were waiting at the bus stop to board vehicles to their respective homes.

According to one of the survivors, Ngozi Ijedibia, a woman selling vegetables and fruits at the junction, no fewer than six students were feared dead in the accident, while 10 others were critically wounded, with head, limb and body injuries.

Mrs. Ijedibia told the reporter: "The students had just closed from school and were waiting in their numbers to board buses to their various homes. They were waiting at the spot where the accident occurred when the car rammed into them."

"One of the victims was an old man who had his right leg broken. His right eye was cut open and a whitish substance was oozing out of his forehead."

One of the students feared to have been killed in the accident was crushed in the head. "She was wearing the uniform of Union Secondary School. Her innocence and beauty reflected as she lay lifeless on the road. It was a moving sight," she said.

Several other persons were trapped for minutes inside a commercial bus that attempted to avoid colliding with the killer Toyota Camry before men of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) arrived at the venue for the evacuation of the dead and injured.

The car also crushed the stands of people selling fruits, food items and recharge cards around the area. Many of the female traders and vendors were seriously injured.

Tears streamed down many faces. The entire atmosphere was charged as wailing sympathizers scampered about to rescue the victims. The road was littered with assorted



• A student injured in the accident

items, including fruits, vegetables, torn umbrellas and destroyed tables on which they were previously placed.

The driver of the car, who was also injured in the incident, was able to climb out of the mangled car. According to some eyewitnesses, He went back inside the car, retrieved some valuables and crossed the road to catch a cab to wherever he was headed.

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Men of the FRSC came to the area about 20 minutes after the crash. But by then, sympathizers had already ferried the victims to nearby hospitals. One of the hospitals, it was learnt, was the Enugwu-Ukwu General Hospital. The FRSC men then proceeded to tow the mangled car away.

The Anambra State Sector Commander of the Federal Road Safety Commission, Mr. Hyginus Omeje, who confirmed the incident, said he was waiting for his men to give him the details of the accident.

The Old Onitsha-Enugu road has become the preferred alternative route for motorists in the area. Many road users now prefer the road to the dualised expressway after the state government reconstructed it.

Meanwhile, the state governor, Chief Willie Obiano, while sympathizing with the victims of the accident, promised to take care of the hospital bills of the surviving students in the various hospitals. The governor also promised to give the dead ones befitting burials.

Governor Obiano, during his visit to some of the students receiving treatment at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital, Nnewi, described the incident as a sad loss to Ndi Anambra and families of the deceased in particular.

He said in line with his administration's resolve to better the lot of the people of the state, the state government would intensify efforts to make sure that the reconstruction of the Onitsha-Enugu expressway was completed quickly to reduce the level of traffic in the rural roads which he said was the cause of the death of the innocent school children. The governor prayed God to grant the dead eternal rest.