

Minister, wife, son die in crash

•Atiku, Ngige, Umahi, Ekwunife mourn Ocholi family

From **Emmanuel Adeyemi**, Lokoja & **Emmanuel Uzoh**, Abakaliki

TRAGEDY hit the federal cabinet yesterday when the Minister of State for Labour and Productivity, Mr James Enejoh Ocholi (SAN), his wife and son, the police orderly and one female occupant died in an accident along Kaduna/Abuja road.

The minister was coming from Kaduna where he spent the weekend and was returning to Abuja when his convoy was involved in the accident around noon.

The accident occurred at Doke Village, 50 kilometres away from Kaduna. An eyewitness said the minister's car had a burst tyre before somersaulting several times.

Although there were conflicting details on the exact number of casualty, Ocholi died on the spot while the other three other occupants, gave up the ghost on their way to the hospital. The remains of Ocholi with others have been deposited at the National Hospital, Abuja

Ocholi, in his late 50s, hails from Ogbadage in Dekina Local Government Area of Kogi State. He was a governorship

aspirant of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in 2011 elections and later defected to the All Progressives Congress (APC) where he also contested the primary in August last year.

He was also a member of the defunct Congress for Progressive Change (CPC).

Kogi residents received the news with shock yesterday as many discussed the demise of the Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN). Governor Yahaya Bello has expressed shock and devastation.

In a statement issued by his Chief Press Secretary, Kingsley Fanwo, the governor described the late Ocholi as a pragmatic, dynamic, humane and brilliant legal practitioner, who was known for his approach to legal and political issues and one of the most unswerving constitutional lawyers Nigeria has ever produced.

The state chapter of APC described Ocholi's death as a great loss to the state and Nigeria. The Treasurer, Mr. Ismail Yahaya Adesayo, who confirmed the incident, described his death as very unfortunate.

The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) confirmed that the remains of the minister were deposited at the morgue of the National Hospital, Abuja.

The Kaduna State Governor, Nasir El-Rufai, confirmed this in his facebook post:

"It is with great sadness that the Kaduna State Ministry of Health and Human Services further announces the death of Mrs. Ocholi at Doka Hospital, who was in coma since the accident near Rijana, along the Kaduna-Abuja Road. Earlier, the death of Minister Ocholi and his son were announced. May their souls rest in perfect peace, Amen."

Mourning Ocholi, Minister of Labour and Employment, Senator Chris Ngige, Governor David Umahi of Ebonyi State and Senator Uche Ekwunife have expressed shock, describing his death as national calamity.

Senator Ngige, who was sober over the death of his junior, expressed shock that Ocholi died in active service. He said Ocholi was an amiable and responsible family man.

"I was with him on Wednesday when we went to Kaduna Trade Fair, I asked after him and he told me he was doing fine, his death has brought the entire country and the ministry into mourning. He was amiable and a responsible family man who was very hardworking....I am short of words"

Governor Umahi described

Ocholi's death as sad. He consoled with President Muhammadu Buhari, the deceased family and Nigeria.

Governor Umahi described Ocholi as a nice and responsible man who was conscious of his responsibility and prayed God to grant him eternal rest.

Senator Ekwunife also commiserated with the President and the entire staff of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity over the tragedy.

She expressed shock over Ocholi's death, saying it was a national calamity.

Also, former Vice President and chieftain of APC, Atiku Abubakar, has expressed shock and sadness at Ocholi's death.

A statement from Atiku's Media Office described the late Ocholi as "a wise and brilliant man, who was expected to impact significantly on the Buhari administration and the lives of Nigerians in many positive ways."

Atiku lamented that the nation has lost a committed professional whose place in his profession, political party and the budding administration in place today, would be hard to fill. It urged Ocholi's friends and President Buhari, colleagues at the Federal Executive Council (FEC) and Nigerians to take heart and bear the irreparable loss.