

How shock allegedly killed 2 pregnant women, 2 others over eviction at Mandilas

• Allegations by traders spurious – Counsel

By Steve Agbota

BENNIE Moore Traders Association have decried the death of their four members, including two pregnant women and two others allegedly due to their eviction from a shopping complex at Mandilas Market in Lagos.

The traders, who spoke with Daily Sun, said the two pregnant women and two other traders died as a result of shock following the ejection of the members of the association from a plaza located at Breadfruit area in Lagos Island.

Therefore, the traders called on both Federal and Lagos State governments to intervene in order to avert more disaster, as they are currently unable to trade for the past three months after being ejected from their various shops.

Chairman of the association, Ogbonna Okoro, told Daily Sun that the shopping complex was leased to the traders in 2009 by Heavenly Home Limited, popularly known as Bennie Moore with initial rent of three year upfront in 2019.

He also alleged that Africa Alliance conspired with a new developer, Nnamdi Dike Global Mass to evict all the tenants from the building while the traders' three years rent would end in December 2023.

When Daily Sun contacted the landlord of the traders, Bennie Moore, he was infuriated, refused to comment and warned our reporter never to call his mobile number again.

All efforts to reach Nnamdi Dike proved abortive as he refused to pick his calls.

Meanwhile, the counsel of African Alliance Nigeria Plc, Ifeoma Ezeribe described the allegation raised by the traders as spurious, saying the matter is still before the magistrate court.

She said: "The property was sealed by LASBCA, our client has nothing to do with the sealing of the property or ejection of anybody from the property, adding that LASBCA has served contravention notice on that property and all the tenants were aware.

"The major complain from LASBCA is that the tenants were using many generators in the building. So, it affected the structural integrity of the property and the LASBCA sealed the property, saying that if they should continue this way it could collapse one day.

"There have to be structural rectification on the property and that was what happened. The situation was explained to the traders even before open court, the magistrate was aware of the



• Bennie Moore shopping complex

contravention notice and everything was done properly and Bennie Moore was also aware."

Conversely, the lawyer to Ogbonna Okoro and all the traders, Nwota Chinedu, alleged that there was unlawful barricade without giving any notice.

He said on June 15, 2020, the LASBCA came to the property and pasted a notice that the building required integrity test and earlier in January of that year, the traders' landlord whom they have been remitting their rent to for the past 11 years, demanded for a three year rent in advance despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

"As traders, everybody had to source for the money through borrowing and all that. They paid three years that would expire in 2023. When LASBCA pasted the notice and demanding integrity test, traders contributed the money and financed the integrity test through their then landlord, Heavenly Home Limited, also known as Bennie Moore.

"The integrity test was conducted by Lagos State Material Testing Laboratory, which is in charge of that responsibility. The test shows that the building is 90 per cent strong or structurally sound. However, there were minor renovations recommended like repainting the whole building, changing of broken tiles and windows," he explained.

He said there was nothing wrong with the integrity of the building and the traders were doing their business until August 1, 2021 when an unknown person allegedly came with thugs and barricaded the building, stopping the traders from accessing their goods.

"When we engaged them, he claimed to be the agent of African Alliance Plc. When the

traders insisted, he brought out a consent judgment entered in court on August 25 between African Alliance and Heavenly Home where they, before a high court appointed, him as the agent of the property and that was why he wants to take possession.

Meanwhile, the counsel for Heavenly Home Limited, Aminat Mustapha, said after the lease expired, Heavenly Home board

of directors were not interested in renewing a new lease because they claimed they were not satisfied with the way the property was being used.

According to her, as at then, LASBCA was serving contravention notice on the property and the traders know.

She explained: "And then they said if they still want to maintain the property at all cost, they have to start paying N40 million in a year. Our client asked why should they pay N40 million for this property and he was ready to handover the property.

"My client called the traders to inform them about the development and they said no that if it is about money, they will contribute the money to maintain the lease on the property. The traders said okay that they would pay three years.

"To be fair to African Alliance, their board of directors said no, they don't want them on the property any longer because of the way our client was using the property."

She added that as at then, the tenants on the property have already agreed among themselves that the lease should be extended, that they were going to pay.

Meanwhile, Women leader of the association, Rashidat Olarewaju, described the situation as unlawful and begged government to come to their aids.

"It is not only the Igbo trading in the plaza, the Yoruba and other people are there too. We call on the government to intervene on the issue, because life has been difficult for the traders in the last three months of not doing anything," she cried.