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Nigeria: 70 Killed in Anambra Multiple Accident

Charles Onyekamuo

10 October 2009

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Onitsha — It was a black Friday yesterday in Anambra State as about 70 people were roasted in a multiple accident that occurred at the Umunya Junction, Oyi council area end of the Enugu-Onitsha expressway involving a fuel tanker, six commuter buses, one BMW car, and a Hilux pick-up van.

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Eye witnesses, told THISDAY at the scene of the accident, that the fuel tanker was coming from the Onitsha end of the expressway and as it attempted passing through the deep gullies at the junction, it fell as it swerved and its contents spilled on the highway.

According to the witness, a BMW car that approached the scene also attempted to dodge the fallen tanker, and there was an explosion which suddenly ignited fire on the spilt fuel which raged and burnt the three occupants of the car, the occupants of the other six commuter buses behind, as well as the Hilux van and its occupants.

It was a sordid sight to behold as people were trapped in the commuter buses, yelling in anguish and agony without help coming from anywhere. Bye-standers and sympathisers wept profusely.

The carcass of the charred bodies as at 4pm was even more bizarre to behold, as some of them were burnt beyond recognition from a fire that started at about 12.15pm according to witnesses.

THISDAY checks revealed that about 12 commuters and five others in the last two buses behind jumped out of their commercial vehicles and escaped unhurt as the fire raged.

Operations Commander of the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) Awka Command, Mr. B. N. Ekenna said they got information about a tanker that fell and caught fire around Umunya at about 1.15pm, prompting them to rush to the scene and mobilising the Nteje and Onitsha Units of the Command in the process.

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He said that by the time they arrived, the damage had been done as the fire raged. Nine vehicles on the whole were involved; there was a tanker, then six busses, one Hilux pick up van and a BMW car

Five people jumped out alive and other survivors were with the crowd, some with bruises and we have taken them to the general hospital.

However the primary cause is the dilapidated nature of the road. Because had it been the road was good, the tanker would have passed and it couldn't have fallen. That is the major cause of this accident.

We can't be sure about the number of survivors but there is group of youth, they call them Okpoko community youth Onitsha who were said to be attending a burial at Nsukka. They number over eleven that survived and five others. So at least not less than 17 people survived.

"Honestly we cannot estimate the number that had died but you can see that six commuter buses were full of complete passengers and only seventeen can be confirmed as those that escaped and you can see that the fire is still burning so

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the number could be between seventy or more than that but we are still not sure until we complete the evacuation" he said.

Anambra State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Philemon Leha who visited the scene of the accident described it as saddening and unfortunate. He said that efforts were on to evacuate the vehicles, skeletons from the road and try to see if the identities of the victims could be established.

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