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Six Die as Church Building Collapses in Ibadan Rain

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Governor Abiola Ajimobi

By Tunde Sanni

They had left home in search of means of survival for themselves and their

dependants. They had bid their children and loved ones bye without knowing that it would be their final goodbye. They had been engaged as labourers for the construction of a church, the New Covenant Church, Sagbe, off Ojoo road in Akinyele Local Government Area of Ibadan.

The church had been worshipping somewhere around the area. But they recently bought a parcel of land and have been striving to develop it. Yesterday, the one-storey building which had just been decked crumbled, and squeezed some of the workers in the rubbles that literally buried them as well.

The workers had reportedly finished the day's job and were waiting for the foreman to pay them their wages. The heavens had opened up and they scurried for safety under the church structure being constructed. But the foreman was not forthcoming in paying the awaited wages. The rains have started falling heavily, so much that even if they were then paid, they still would need to wait for the rains to subside before venturing into the road.

It did not take long after the walls of the building have been sufficiently soaked and drenched by the rain that, without any sign or warning, suddenly crumbled in one heavy thud. And the church collapsed, burying four of the labourers instantly. It took the labourers unawares. None of them entertained any fear that the decking would collapse. It did. Some who were lucky to have cheated death did so just for a while, as they later died in the hospital. At the last count, death toll in the collapsed church debris had risen to six while two others sustained serious leg injuries.

Eyewitnesses account told THISDAY that it was the prompt and rapid response of security men, men of the Federal Road Safety Corps {FRSC}, policemen and other sympathizers that saved the situation as the death toll could have risen higher.

When THISDAY visited the scene of the incident, the working implements like head pans, shovels, work clothes were seen littering the site. The site wore the mood of gloom and sadness.

One of the survivors, Wole Sokunbi, still under shock, gave the narrative: "we were 13 people working on the building when the rain started and we were waiting under this building to collect our daily allowance from the pastor, the foreman. We suddenly heard the collapse of the building. Only the pastor, myself and one of the women fetching water for us survived".

According to eyewitness, the workers had finished the day's work and were waiting for the contractor to come and give them their wages when the structures caved-in suddenly.

Sympathisers at the site of the collapsed building argued that if the contractor had come on time, the workers would not have met untimely death. Efforts to speak to either the pastor of the church or the foreman proved abortive, as they were said to have immediately fled the site, fearing that they could be attacked or arrested if found.

One of them who preferred anonymity explained that, "They had finished working for the day. They had cleaned up and were waiting for the contractor. Then, the rain started. It was then they took shelter under the deck. Then, suddenly, we heard a loud bang. Two of them tried to escape but the iron rod held their legs. But, they were quickly rescued and taken to the hospital."

A member of the church, Francis Oyegoke described the incident as unfortunate. He prayed that God should grant quick recovery to those who sustained injury.

Oyo state governor, Abiola Ajimobi who rushed to the scene of the incident at the wee hours of Thursday with his wife, Florence, and some members of the state cabinet described the incident as terrible and disheartening.

He blamed the incident on the failure of the contractor handling the church building to use quality materials given the usual inclination of contractors to cut cost for their own selfish benefits.

"If the contractor had not compromised quality, this incident would not have happened," the governor said, regretting that this tragic incident yet took place despite the running campaign for people to stick to standard especially in the construction of buildings. In recent years, the incidences of building collapse have been very frequent and tragic.

He ordered that thorough investigation be carried out on the circumstances surrounding the collapse of the building.

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