

# Lagos Explosion: Community Leaders Allege Bomb Blast

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- **Residents battle FG over ownership of land**

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Community leaders in Abule-Ado area of Lagos State, where an explosion killed 21 people on Sunday, have faulted the government's narrative that the explosion was caused by a ruptured pipeline, attributing it to a bomb blast.

The distressed residents of Soba community have also kicked against the recent moves by the federal government to take over the land that was levelled by the fire.

An additional corpse was recovered from the debris yesterday, bringing the official casualty rate to 21, a claim countered by the Soba Landlord/Residents Association that said they lost 30 people, including the Board of Trustee (BoT) chairman, his wife and children.

Faulting the stance of emergency stakeholders, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and the government, the Chairman of the Landlords/Residents Association of Soba, Chief Gani Adams, said the incident could not have been a pipeline explosion, given the magnitude of the destruction.

Adams, who spoke through Mr. Chime Umadim, said: "Contrary to the submission of the Group

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"Suffice to say that at no time has pipeline explosion caused the type of heavy blast that resonated far beyond the immediate communities such as FESTAC Town and Satellite Town to farther communities as Ijanikin, Badagry, Orile Iganmu, Surulere, Ijegan, Ejigbo and Oshodi to mention just a few, leaving behind at its wake shattered windows and roof of houses."

The association also called on the federal and state governments to set up a high-powered fact-finding committee to unravel the immediate and remote causes of the explosion, which they described as a national disaster.

"It is indeed very unfortunate that we lost our board of Trustee (BoT) chairman, wife, children and over 30 others. We need help from the government to put our lives together," it added.

The Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN), in a statement, also said the scale of destruction witnessed at Abule-Ado could only be likened to military grade explosions or aerial bombardment.

It charged the federal government to carry out forensic investigation of the immediate and remote cause of the explosion.

According to Head, Media and Campaigns, Mr. Philip Jakpor, the team formed this opinion after visiting the scene to document impacts.

While demanding a forensic investigation to ascertain the true cause of the incident, Jakpor also called on the Lagos State Governor, Mr. Babajide Sanwo-Olu, to immediately set up a special taskforce on pipelines security to prevent pipeline accidents in the state.

He said: "The Sunday morning blast occurred near the popular ASPAMDA market and Mechanic village in Abule Ado, Amuwo Odofin Local Government Area. The vibrations from the blast shook many parts of the state and were felt as far as Iba, Okokomaiko, Agege, Alimosho and Surulere, among others.

"The Lagos government had earlier stated the incident was not in any way linked to pipeline vandalism but could not provide details on the cause of the incident but the NNPC insisted it was caused by a truck that hit some cylinders stacked in a gas processing plant located near the corporations' system 2B Pipeline right of way.

"The federal government should not be too casual to conclude that the incident was an accident, noting that the accounts of the NNPC on the real cause of the blast are unconvincing and raise some questions."

### **Residents Battle FG over Ownership of Land**

Meanwhile, the battle between the residents and the federal government began after the acting Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer of Federal Housing Authority (FHA), Mr. Umar Buntu, visited the site of the explosion and said the land belonged to the government.

According to Buntu, the federal government acquired the large expanse of land from Ojo Barracks to Trade Fair, including the Soba axis, in 1970.

While commiserating with the victims, he, however, noted that many of the buildings in the area had encroached into the government acquired land, making them illegal occupants.

He said: "The Amuwo-Odofin residents are claiming ownership while the government had

"The government is coming back to take charge, a task force and the Lagos State government is going to help the federal government to sanitise this place after proper investigation have been done and decision taken.

"Most of the land owners here did not buy from FHA and if they did, let them bring the title they have. They don't have any title with us, we are not aware.

"All along, while we have been coming here, the place kept expanding and the family kept selling to unsuspecting members of the public and they don't have anything to show for it."

But in his reaction, the Baale of Soba, Chief Raheem Agbebeji, said the affected portion belonged to a family and not the government.

The Baale, who spoke through the family secretary, Alhaji Umaru, said: "Soba is not an illegal community. We were formally in Trade Fair Complex, but when the federal government came with trade fair complex, they shifted us here, which was part of our farmland we inherited from our forefathers.

"The government compensated us for having to destroy our farmlands at Soba to build houses, after moving us here.

"The truth remains that Soba town has been in existence for over 300 years and we have it in the government archives. We own even down to Barrack and Volks. We have common boundary with Amuwo-Odofin.

"There is a barricade by the NNPC, that is the boundary that we cannot cross and we did not cross. Last month, the army and NNPC even cleared makeshift houses and containers around that area."

Joining the fray, the landlords' association said they had legal documents backing their stay in the community.

Adams said they had been communicating with FHA to finalise the process of getting their certificate of occupancy, before the tragic incident.

According to him, "Some of us have been here for over two or three decades, and we have met FHA on several occasions.

"They have our master and survey plan, and they know we are living here. We are not aliens and we have been working hand in hand with them. We are not illegal occupants.

"Our documents are intact. They even delineated this place to us. They know we are here."

However, as the death toll increased by one, the Director-General, Lagos State Environmental Management Agency (LASEMA), Dr. Olufemi Oke-Osanyintolu, said the additional body was brought out as the emergency responders were carrying out recovery and salvage operations on the incident site.

He said: "The teams continue to carry out recovery and salvage operations at the incident site. An additional body was retrieved today (yesterday), bringing the total number of fatalities to 21.

"Four hundred and sixty eight people were displaced from their homes and 100 of them are now in the relief camp. Two are still missing.

"Our help desk remains manned and our personnel are available to manage enquiries and