

Death toll in pipeline fire rises to 284

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LAGOS — The death toll in the oil pipeline fire in Nigeria's main city, Lagos, has risen to 284 after 15 more people succumbed to their injuries in hospital, medical authorities announced Friday.

The last figure given out by the Red Cross was of 269 bodies counted at the scene of the disaster in a northern suburb of the city.

Most of the victims received a mass burial early Wednesday. Plastic surgeon Idowu Feyebi at Lagos university hospital said 25 critically ill victims were still being treated there.

7 more victims die at LASUTH

At the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH), seven of the 23 explosion victims brought there in the wake of the pipeline explosion at Abule-Egba area of Lagos were confirmed dead over the last forty-eight hours.

This was the position of the Chief Medical Director (CMD) of the hospital, Dr. Femi Olugbile when he received the Vice Chairman and Managing Director of Nigerian Agip Oil Company (NAOC) in his office yesterday.

The CMD also stated that at the moment all that is being worked towards is optimising the chances of survival of the victims, he said presently there are thirteen of the victims in the burns unit while three are at the emergency unit most of whom are still in very critical stage.

Dr. Olugbile who received various drug items and relief materials valued at over six million naira from the Management of NAOC stated that he would ensure that the drugs as well as every other items deployed to the hospital are judiciously utilised.

He thanked the company saying that even in the midst of its own problems such as the hostage taking, currently the other of the day in the creeks of the Niger-Delta region, the company could still deem it fit to be the first in offering such assistance and that it was a very commendable move.

He stated further that the items received and the ones promised by the company goes beyond the present needs of the victims as it will enable the company to better deal with situations of this nature whenever the need arises, just as he also noted that the Chief Executive officer of the company Mr. Paolo Scolari had earlier offered to partner with the hospital in the area of capacity building.

"If you look around this place

you will see a lot of construction work going on and the whole purpose of it is to enhance the capacity of the hospital, in the area of flying in a burns expert. It's not as if we don't have our own burns specialist, we actually have our own Professor Ademule who is a world renowned burns specialist but the very act of people interacting across boundaries will enrich knowledge and enhance peoples understanding of what entails around the world and would also help to foster the relationship that we tend to build across boundary.

Hence we shall continue to exert ourselves maximally to ensure that as much of our people who lie in this critical situation are given the possibility of survival," he said.

Survivors flee hospitals

In a related development, indications emerged yesterday that survivors of Tuesday pipeline explosion at Awori under Ojokoro Local Government who are undergoing treatment in some private hospitals around the area, are fleeing the hospitals for fear of being prosecuted.

Saturday Vanguard was reliably informed that out of the several survivors distributed around privates hospitals in the area, only five are still undergoing treatment while others have reportedly fled. Some of them, as learnt, left without an official discharge from the hospital authorities. Others, who were forced to be discharged officially, were said to have been done under pressures from their relatives.

Saturday Vanguard investigation revealed that the whereabouts of those who left without notice are still unknown. Some of them were even said to have given fake identities and addresses, which made it difficult for them to be traced.

Sources at the hospital disclosed that most of them, after regaining consciousness, escaped on Thursday night, after watching the news of the pipeline explosion on the television.

A visit to Evangel, Hamkard and Onyx hospitals, all around the area, confirmed that the victims were no longer under their care. However, an official of the Red Cross, Mr Ige Oladimeji said only five out of the twenty survivors were remaining in an undisclosed hospital.

Said he, "We are saying that they should come out so that they can get adequate treatment. They should not be afraid of any prosecution. As at December 27, we had twenty of them spread across some private hospitals. But as at yesterday, there were only five left in the hospitals"

Meanwhile, tears flowed freely as relatives of victims of the explosion thronged the scene. One of them, Mr Ossai who claimed to have lost a son in the fire, said, "the most painful aspect is that I can not get the remains of my first son to bury. I actually traveled and came back last night when I was informed that my fifteen year-old son was among those roasted to dead. So you mean Osasoyen is gone just like that. she asked, directing his question to no one in particular.

