

Who could have done this to us?

●Relations of Chief Uzamere, the Obadulaye of Benin Kingdom ask, after three of the chief's children got roasted to death in a mystery night-time fire that razed down his home

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IT was a dark Friday for Chief Victor Uzamere, the Obadulaye of Benin

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Kingdom when a mystery fire gutted his building. Three of his children were burnt to death in the inferno, while all his properties were also consumed in the blaze which raged for several hours last week.

The deceased children Osaze (21), Orobosa (14) and Osasu (9), were said to be asleep when the fire started at about 10:30pm that Friday and before it was discovered that there was a fire outbreak in the house, the evil fire had already roasted the children in their sleep. When *Saturday Vanguard* visited the scene, Chief Uzamere and his wife were not at the scene of the incident as they were said to be at an undisclosed hospital. All efforts made to speak with Chief Uzamere proved abortive as he told *Saturday Vanguard* that he was still in pains because he had burns on his head. When he was asked where he could be reached his wife picked the phone, and in a very angry tone, told this reporter that "Don't you see that we do not have a house again, and people are after our lives so you want us to disclose where we are? It was reliably learnt that fear gripped the Benin chief and his wife owing to suspicions that some persons had set their home on fire while they were all asleep. The motive, according to a family source was to wipe out the entire family.

Consequently, the Uzameres have been in

hiding since the incident because of the fear that the perpetrators of the crime may still be out there hunting for them. Mrs Uzamere who confirmed this on phone pleaded with this reporter not to bother seeing them because "we are far away. My husband is still not strong and we are hiding because some people are after our lives. We are devastated because we lost three of our children in one day, so what else can we say?" The line went dead.

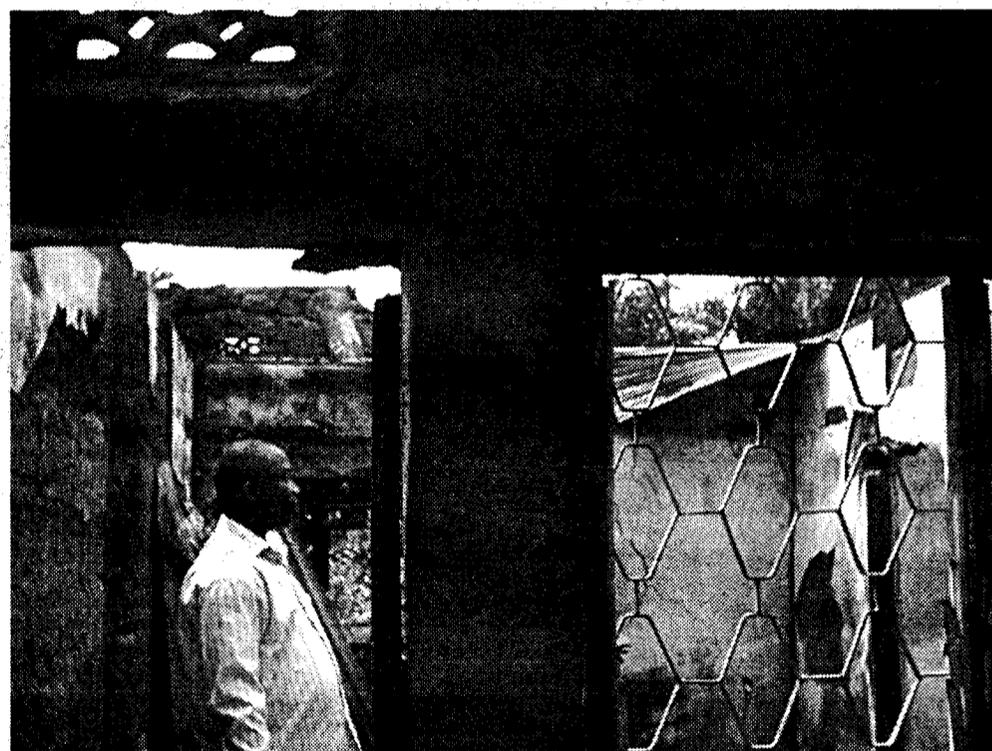
The Edo State Police Commissioner, Mr. Bala Hassan who visited the scene, expressed shock over the incident.

"This is absurd and unbelievable. I just heard about the incident this morning and I had to rush down here only to find out that it was more serious than I expected. You should know that it is always devastating for one to lose children in just a twinkling of an eye. I cannot say this is exactly what happened but we are investigating the matter very seriously. And I want to assure you that if it is something that was done by anybody, the person will never go unpunished because this is wicked".

The cause of the fire still remains a mystery because it was shocking to know from the fire fighters who came to put off the fire that as they were trying to do that, the fire was escalating the more. Everything in the building



●Burnt-out remains of the Uzamere home



●Erik Iyase, in-law to Chief Uzamere in the room where the three children were burnt to death. Photos by Simon Ebegbulem

was reduced to ashes. But angry sympathizers who besieged the number 2 Edo Street, scene of the incident, blamed the unfortunate situation on the late arrival of the men of the fire brigade who they believed would have saved the situation if they had arrived earlier.

However, in the absence of the parents of the victims, *Saturday Vanguard* spoke to a nephew to Chief Uzamere, Osato Osawaru who witnessed the incident, and his son-in-law, Erik Iyase. They lamented the deaths and declared that the family is currently mourning the deaths of the three lovely children. Osato

Osawaru, nephew to Chief Uzamere said he fought doggedly to save his three cousins but his efforts were unfortunately not enough. He narrated the story to *Saturday Vanguard*.

Excerpts:
"You see, my uncle was the one that brought me up and I have always lived with him. But that day the incident happened, I came back from work at about after ten, and there was no light. But I heard people shouting fire! fire!! while some were shouting: robbers! robbers!!

But I now decided to come out to see what was happening and it was when I came out that I saw one of my brothers who started shouting that there was fire in my uncle's house. So I now jumped the fence I saw fire everywhere. The entire roof of the house was burning. So I had to jump the fence again so that I can go and get an axe to open the gate so that people can enter the compound and assist us in rescuing my uncle and the children.

succeeded in breaking the gate and immediately I did that people now rushed into the compound. We started the rescue mission. My uncle was shouting that the children were still in the room. First of all we tried to push the car parked in the compound outside so that it will not explode.

"My uncle and the wife ran out, but he insisted that we should try and bring out the children but the fire was already every where. The fire brigade people now came, but as they were trying to put the light off, it was burning the more. They now became angry that their water was finished; that this fire was a mysterious one because their two tankers should have been able to put off the fire but it was not the case here. So my uncle insisted that he must rescue his children. As he was trying to do that fire fell on his head he had to run back and some part of his body got burnt. The names of my three cousins that died were Osaze (21), Orobosa, and Osasu who was just nine

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year old. After the fire came down, we managed to find their remains and went to bury them.

It is still unbelievable

The family is yet to believe that it is true. Had it been that it was only the house that got burnt we would have been happy. Look at my three cousins —they just died the same day, it is unbelievable. Look at the smallest girl that died, Osasu, she is the one that always came to call me that my food is ready (weeping). I just do not know what to say again, it is very painful. My uncle has lost all his properties; nothing was saved in that house. My soul, my heart is burning but my tears are helpless. We know that the fire is not ordinary; somebody planned it to wipe out the entire family but God will judge. That is why my uncle

cannot talk to any body now because he is in an undisclosed hospital because of security reasons.

Erik Iyase, Chief Uzamere's in-law,
described the incident as mysterious

"I rushed down here immediately after the incident but I was told that at about 10:30pm, one of the daughters was still awake, so she started shouting: Daddy there is fire in the house! there is fire in the house!! But before they observed that there was fire, the building was almost finished. The other children were still in their rooms sleeping and before their father could do anything his own room was already burning too so he had to run out of the house. It was sympathizers who came that assisted my sister and her husband in pulling out one of the protectors in the window for them to escape with one of the daughters. But three of the children

were not lucky enough to escape. The boy who was about 21 years old died, the boy who is ten years and the small girl about eight years all died before any help could come. In fact, if not for the girl that also survived that raised the alarm, my sister and her husband would have died too.

We are mourning

It is a disaster to our family. What we are all praying now is for God to reveal whoever is responsible for this wicked act. We are suspecting that somebody threw fire into the house while everybody was sleeping because at the time of this fire there was no light and nothing like fire was put on in the house. So you cannot say it was electrical fault because NEPA was off. But suddenly the fire started from the center of the roof. So, somebody is behind this whole thing and God will surely punish the person.